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A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Amirkhanian

'Loudspeakers'

Im Frühling. Loudspeakers (for Morton Feldman). Pianola (Pas de mains). Son of Metropolis San Francisco New World © 2 80817-2 (132' • DDD)



Charles Amirkhanian (b1945), composer, percussionist, record producer (not least

of early discs by Antheil and Nancarrow, whose music Amirkhanian championed) and music festival director, is a key figure in progressive American music. His work has appeared on a number of discs, including two – from CRI and Starkland – devoted wholly to him. The four works included on New World's two-disc set, however, give the broadest, most engaging perspective on his creativity. *Pianola* (Pas de mains) is a set of 10 electroacoustic studies (1997–2000) centred around pianola and piano-roll recordings of music by Stravinsky (snatches of *Petrushka*), Hindemith, Grainger, Honegger and Nancarrow, among others. Individual movements focus specifically, sometimes punningly, for example 'Tochastic Music' (Xenakis meets Ernst Toch), 'Antheil Swoon' and 'A Rimsky Business', in which Korsakov's bee tackles Herculean tasks. The concluding 'Kiki's Keys' piles up quotes and allusions in a joyful mash-up that would have delighted Ives.

Im Frühling (1989–90) is a sound collage, assembled from natural sounds and then synthesised electronically into what annotator Kyle Gann (himself a noted composer) terms 'a tone poem in reverse', where transformed sounds are then set in counterpoint with their source material. *Son of Metropolis San Francisco* (1997), a reduced version of a much longer electroacoustic work from 1985–86, combines natural sounds – mating elephant seals, not least – with human material from the Pacific region. A homage to his adopted home city, there are allusions to the musics of Lou Harrison, Terry Riley and La Monte Young in the later stages.

The title-track, *Loudspeakers* (1988–90), is a 'text-sound' work, constructed not from notes and pitches of the chromatic or any other scale but from human speech. A portrait and homage in seven panels to the iconic composer Morton Feldman (1926–87), it is assembled with great verve, and as a soundscape it is very entertaining, but is it music? Musical processes are clearly deployed in the construction, as can be heard by following the text, which is treated no worse than in many an opera or oratorio, and the ultimate result is, in my view, musical. Feldman-like, the suite is called *Loudspeakers* because that is what this music is intended to be played on. An ear-opening release. **Guy Rickards**

Farrenc

Air russe varié. Cavatine de Norma, Op 14 No 1. Études, Op 26 (excs). Souvenir des Huguenots, Op 19

Joanne Polk pf

Steinway & Sons © STNS30133 (70' • DDD)



Since Joanne Polk has long championed piano music by important

pioneering women composers such as Fanny Hensel and Amy Beach, perhaps it was just a matter of time before she turned her attention to Louise Farrenc (1804–75).

The opening selection, *Air russe varié*, may hold little interest beyond surface charm and skilful pacing, yet Polk's direct and assertive interpretation easily eclipses its recorded predecessors. Like many other composer/pianists of her generation, Farrenc contributed to the operatic paraphrase genre. Polk's clarion projection of melodies and inherent sense of drama vivify two pieces respectively drawing upon music from Bellini's *Norma* and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*.

Farrenc's piano études occasionally turn up in teaching anthologies for didactic purposes, yet Polk has culled a selection whose purely musical appeal speaks for itself. Book 1's standouts include several quasi-Mendelssohn galops in triple metre

(Nos 5 and 11), a lyrical piece with a busy, rolling accompaniment (No 9) and an unpretentious fugue on two subjects (No 12). Incidentally, I prefer Polk's perky reading of the latter to Konstanze Eickhorst's plainer and slower performance (CPO). Book 2's études are altogether superior creations, from the stormy chromatic patterns in No 17 to No 25's unrelentingly rapid left-hand runs. Polk plays them with total conviction and mastery. In sum, this well-engineered and thoughtfully programmed release is first choice for anyone seeking an introduction to Farrenc's solo piano output. **Jed Distler**

Vali

Áshoob^a. Love Drunk^b. Ormavi^c.

Raak^c. Three Romantic Songs^b

^bCharles Wetherbee vn ^aDariush Saghafi santoor

^bDavid Korevaar pf ^{ac}Carpe Diem Quartet

MSR Classics © MS1738 (72' • DDD)



This sixth album from the Iranian composer Reza Vali is dedicated to love and longing

as heard through a lavishly coloured, musically exhilarating kaleidoscope of Persian and Western forms and content. It is the improvisational nature of the three works written for and performed by the Carpe Diem Quartet with great gusto and an emphasis on exotic folk and Eastern influences that produces the most powerful effects, as in the eight intriguing meditations of *Ormavi*, told, the composer says, 'from a solely Persian perspective'.

The 18-minute *Raak*, No 15 in the composer's 'Calligraphy' series based on a Persian system of modes similar to Indian ragas, is even more unpredictable in its mood and movement; the wealth of evocative sounds and sources Vali uses to achieve his many climaxes include a melody of Brahmsian breadth and beauty and, at the end, a stunning, brief fragment from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Vali generously and provocatively provides two different versions of *Áshoob*, No 14 in the 'Calligraphy' series. In its



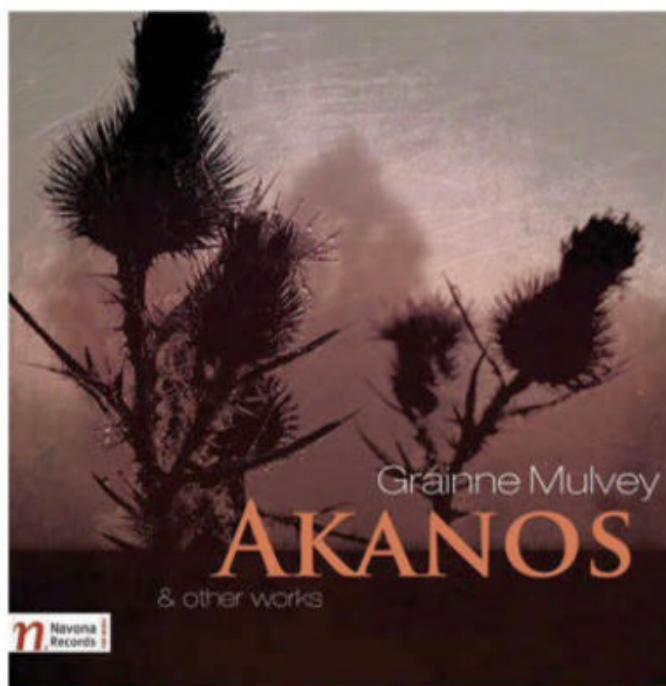
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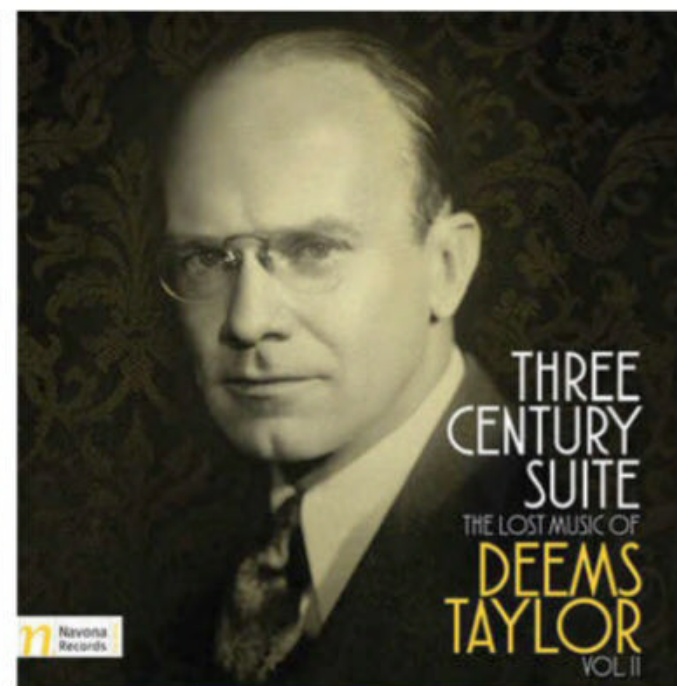
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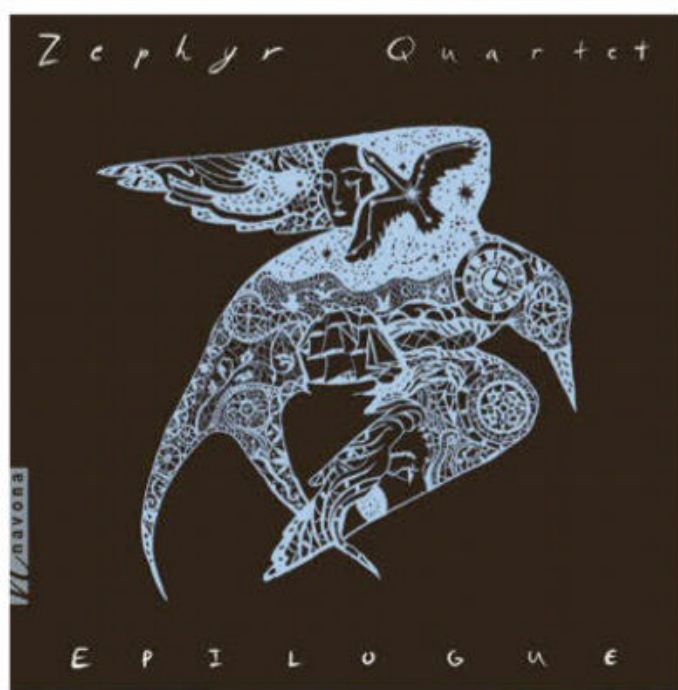


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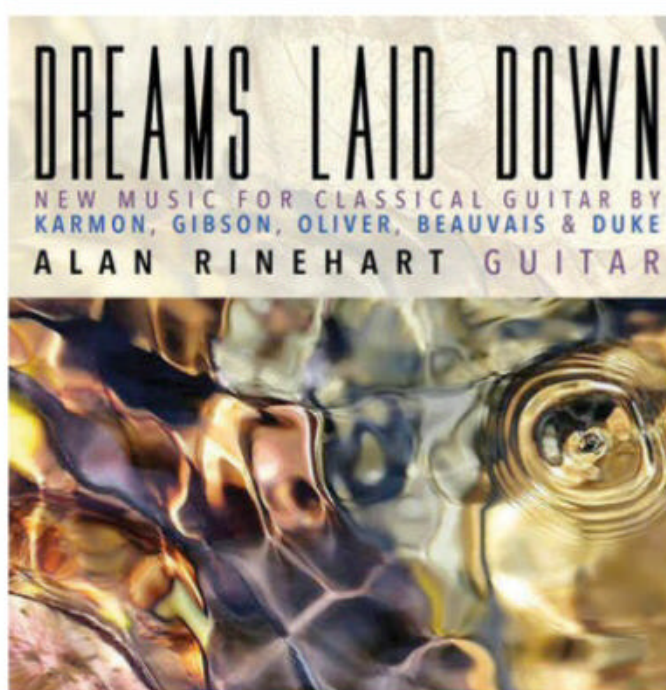
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Conviction and mastery: Joanne Polk focuses her pioneering spirit on the music of the 19th-century French composer Louise Farrenc – see review on page 1

original form for quartet and the Persian hammered dulcimer known as a santur it is a tangibly otherworldly experience; arranged for string quartet alone it is hypnotic in another way, reminiscent at times of Bartók's use of folk sources for melody and energy.

To fill out the disc, the Carpe Diem violinist Charles Wetherbee and the pianist David Korevaar play *Three Romantic Songs*, written for the composer's wife, paying homage to Brahms and concluding with a 'Tango Johannes' which Vali describes as Brahms 'trying to dance the tango with Clara Schumann', and *Love Drunk*, consisting of four pleasantly inebriated folk songs. **Laurence Vittes**

'Once Upon a Time'

Sheehan The Little Mermaid. Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, *interspersed with* **Bernstein** The Lark - No 2, Court Song **Lauridsen** Nocturnes - No 2, Soneto de la noche **Mantyjärvi** El Hambo. Shakespeare Songs - No 3, Double, double, toil and trouble **Pearsall** Lay a garland **Poulenc** Un soir de neige **Rautavaara** Suite de Lorca - No 2, El Grito **Tormis** Three Estonian Game Songs - No 3, The Ship Game. Singing Aboard Ship **Traditional** Fatiše Kolo (arr Markevitch). I-i-o hi-ho (arr Koch) **Vaughan Williams** Three

Shakespeare Songs - No 1, Full fathom five; No 2, The cloud-capp'd towers

Sarah Walker *spkr*

Skylark Vocal Ensemble / Matthew Guard

Skylark © HMR003 (67' • DDD • T/t)



What an alluring release this is, and not only because the music is built around two beloved fairy tales, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (Brothers Grimm) and *The Little Mermaid* (Hans Christian Andersen). For 'Once Upon a Time', Matthew Guard, artistic director of Skylark Vocal Ensemble, and colleagues created a 'choral story concert' that merges texts from the tales with *a cappella* compositions that, although written for other purposes, deftly highlight the emotions and atmospheres in the unfolding narratives.

The repertoire is rich and diverse, ranging from pieces by celebrated composers (Poulenc, Vaughan Williams, Bernstein, Rautavaara) to an array of vibrant works by lesser-known figures closely associated with choral literature. Somehow, the assortment of styles

never feels jarring, partly the result of evocative transitional passages composed by Benedict Sheehan that underline aspects of the texts, which storyteller Sarah Walker reads with fine clarity and nuanced character.

The two stories sound fresh as conceived along these choral lines, and the programme is an opportunity for the inspired singers of Skylark to introduce composers whose work deserves more attention, even without the trials and tribulations of Snow White and the Little Mermaid. Among them are Veljo Tormis, an Estonian who created a large body of eloquent works for chorus, and the Finnish composer Jaakko Mantyjärvi, who is as comfortable in madcap mode (*El Hambo*, for example, depicting the dwarves) as he is in a cackling setting of Shakespeare's 'Double, double, toil and trouble' used to portray Andersen's sea witch.

The members of Skylark sing in half a dozen languages with elegant assurance, bringing colourful details into vivid focus. Whether the concept of the 'choral story concert' could be developed further remains to be explored. Skylark's initial outing in the genre is destined to live happily ever after. **Donald Rosenberg**

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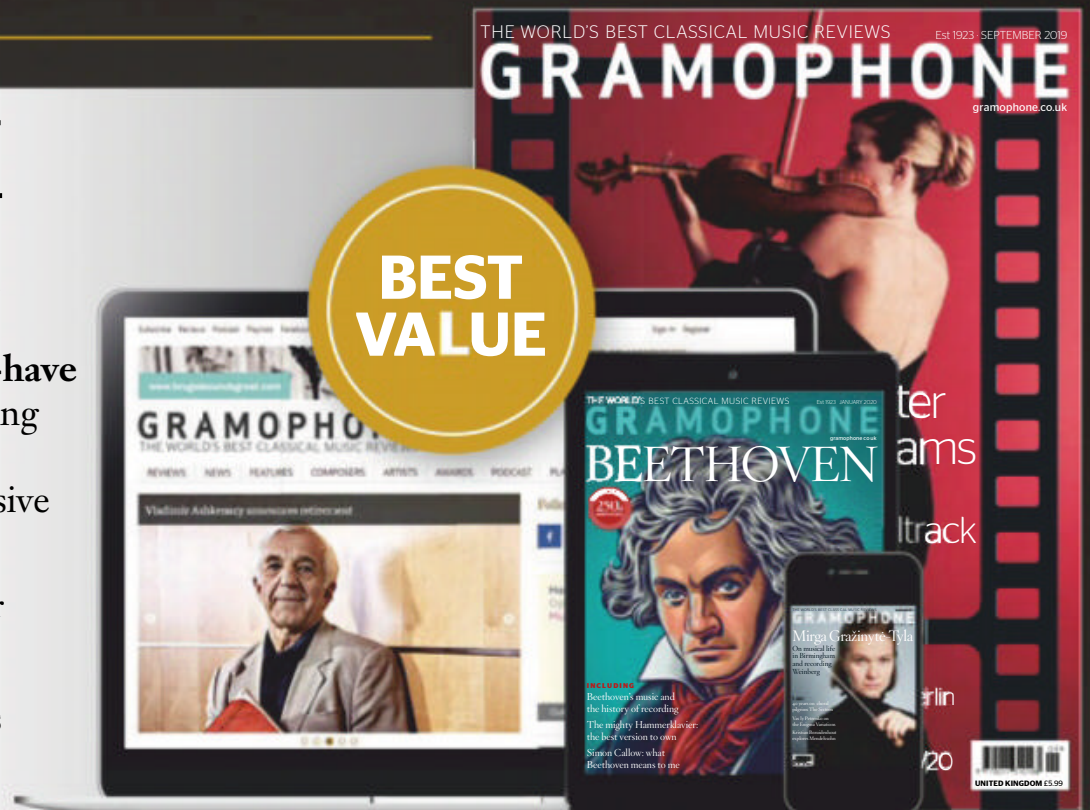
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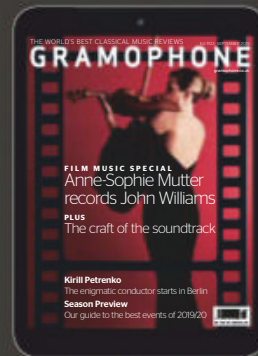
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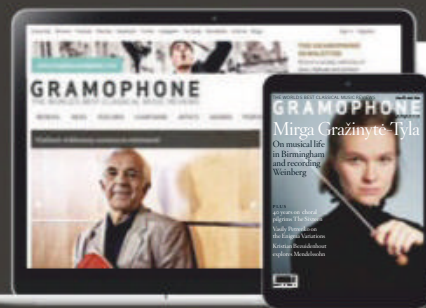
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'Prisma, Vol 3'

Alabaca Ascension^a **Brickman** Restoration^b
Faingold The Defiant Poet: Elegy in Memory
 of Yevgeny Yevtushenko^b **Huff** The Dark
 Glass Sinfonia^b **Morris** Songs of the Seasons^b
Orshansky Spring Fantasy^b **Vassdal** Prelude
 and Fugue^c
^aKarel Dohnal *cl* Janáček Philharmonic
 Orchestra / ^{ac}Robert Kružík, ^bJiří Petrdlík
 Navona © NV6271 (67' • DDD)



Whereas previous instalments of Navona's mixed-composer 'Prisma' series have featured multiple performers, Vol 3 features just one orchestra, the Janáček Philharmonic in Ostrava, albeit with two conductors, Robert Kružík directing the items by Ahmed Alabaca and Audun Vassdal, Jiří Petrdlík conducting the remainder.

Taken together, the seven works form a rather fine and entertaining album. None of the composers is front-line, perhaps, but some of the works definitely deserve wide currency. Ahmed Alabaca's clarinet-and-orchestral *Ascension*, for instance, I could quite see enjoying popularity with its elegiac character (mourning the passing of a clarinetist friend of the composer's) and style close to Copland in the opening movement of his Clarinet Concerto. Sarah Wallin Huff's *The Dark Glass Sinfonia* (2017), on the other hand, is less heart-on-sleeve but no less involving a listen. There is much to enjoy, too, in Raisa Orshansky's *Spring Fantasy* and Craig Morris's engaging suite *Songs of the Seasons*, the four meteorologically themed movements of which describe, respectively, a 'Winter Snowfall', 'Spring Raindrops', 'Summer Waves' and 'Fall Colors'.

The most gripping work here is Noam Faingold's *The Defiant Poet*:

Elegy in Memory of Yevgeny Yevtushenko, commenced shortly after the poet's death in Tulsa (where Faingold also lives) in 2017 and completed that summer. The work is a tone poem inspired by some of the poet's most famous works and catches their air of protest ('Babi Yar', not least) compellingly. By contrast, Scott Brickman's *Restoration* is more rhetorical in form, without the same burning inner compulsion of Faingold's tribute, impressive though it sounds. Norwegian-born Audun Vassdal's *Prelude and Fugue* is more curious, a rather elusive, Blomdahlesque creation.

The performances are well rehearsed and well recorded for the most part, though Brickman's *Restoration* does sound a little tubthumping in places. Definitely worth exploring.

Guy Rickards

Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1971

Architect Rapp & Rapp

Capacity 2675

Resident ensemble Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Moving to Heinz Hall in 1971 was a big step forwards for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. It had previously performed at two venues, Carnegie Music Hall and the Syria Mosque, in the city's Oakland neighbourhood, which is home to two major universities and the Carnegie Museums. Heinz Hall, the orchestra's first real home, is in downtown Pittsburgh among corporate headquarters. The move also turned out to be the first step in the development of a downtown Cultural District.

The hall was a gift to the orchestra by the Howard Heinz Endowments. It was originally constructed in 1927 by the architectural firm of Rapp & Rapp as an opulent movie house called the Loew's Penn Theater, in French Court style with crystal chandeliers and marble staircase. The conversion of the old building to a concert hall was a three-year, \$10 million project led by Stotz, Hess, MacLachlan and Foster architects, with acoustical consultant Heinrich Keilholz. Music director William Steinberg conducted Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony at the first concert on September 10, 1971.

Heinz Hall was designed to be a big multi-purpose hall, suitable for staged shows as well as concerts. It hosted Pittsburgh Opera and Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre until 1987, when the Benedum Center opened one block away. It continues to present touring musicals and other shows.

Heinz Hall underwent a major renovation in the summer of 1995. The \$6.5 million project included a new orchestra shell, removable risers for the orchestra, a new butterfly ceiling



reflector and extensive refurbishment under the direction of architect Albert Filoni of the firm MacLachlan, Cornelius and Filoni, and acoustician Lawrence Kierkegaard. The risers were used only for the 1995-96 season, Lorin Maazel's last as music director.

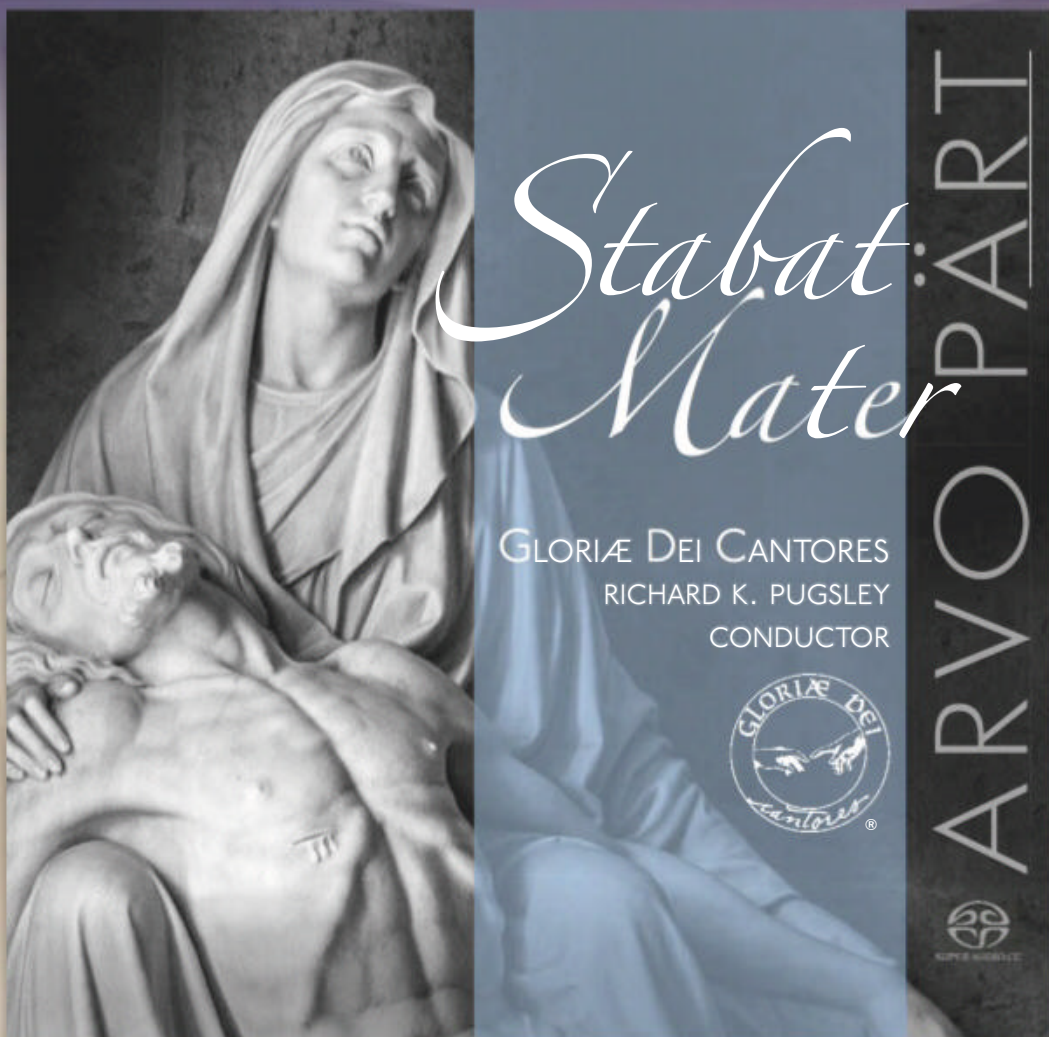
Kierkegaard said the Symphony's decision to keep Heinz Hall as a multi-purpose venue limited acoustical improvement to 75 per cent of what he could have achieved for a dedicated concert hall. In some ways the most appealing seats are the least expensive, near the top of the balcony. There the sound is well blended, with glamorous string sonorities. Those placing a premium on presence, transparency and impact will prefer seats downstairs, towards the centre of the front third of the hall.

Heinz Hall will be renovated again in the summer of 2021, a \$3 million project for 50th anniversary of the hall's opening. It will include new entrances for greater accessibility, the addition of a fifth box office window, painting, gold-leafing and glazing, as well as backstage improvements to dressing rooms and conductors' suites. **Mark Kanny**



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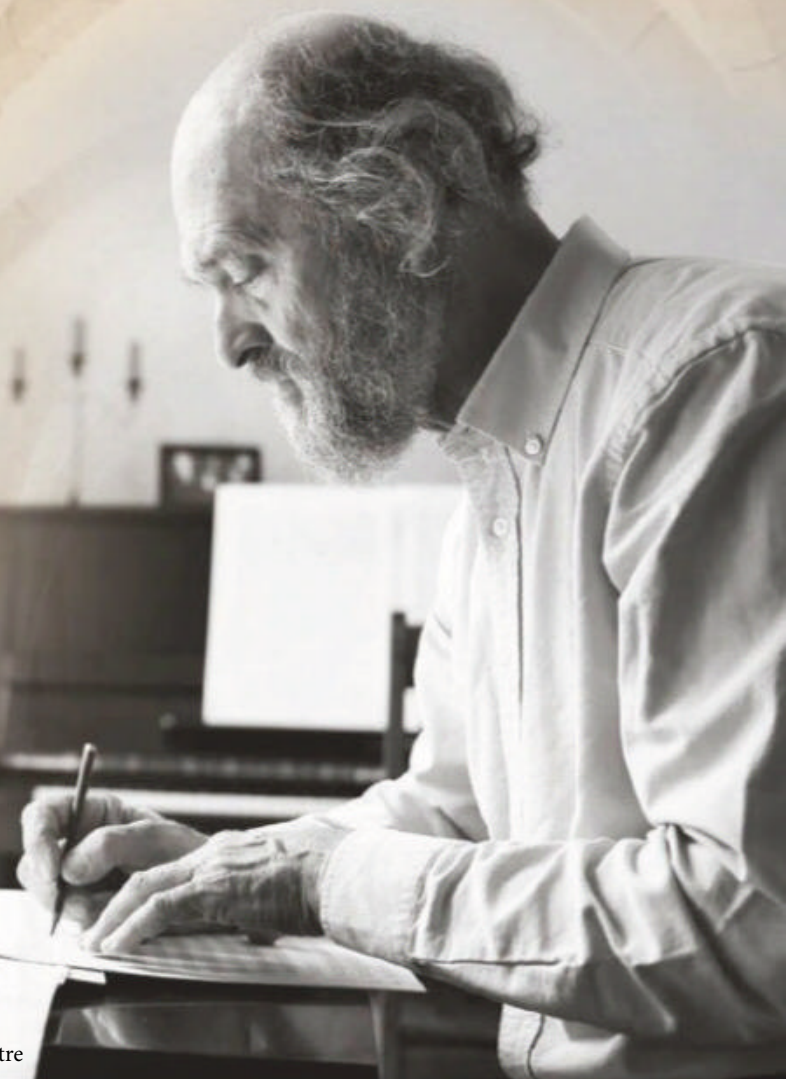


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A LETTER FROM *New York*

Jed Distler reflects on a changed world and new routines in a city hit hard by the global pandemic



We're hunkered down in our Manhattan apartment as Covid-19 hospital admissions, intubations and discharges level off, yet the rate of deaths continues to soar above 9/11's tragic toll. The pandemic has upended musician friends and colleagues, and the economic and emotional ramifications beggar belief. Each day brings further cancellations of concerts, festivals and musical gatherings, and how my city's vibrant music world will transition back to a semblance of normal is anyone's guess.

Ironically, I had cleared my calendar from January through April of 2020, mainly to complete some composing commissions and practise for spring recitals. The latter, of course, are postponed. But I regularly produce radio shows, write CD booklet notes and file my *Gramophone* contributions from home, so I'm lucky.

With shelter-in-place in effect, mundane routines prevail over professional concerns, and life takes on a new rhythm. I wake up, fix espresso, feed the cats, post a link on Facebook to an archival episode from my WWFM radio programme *Between the Keys*. Next I walk in the park, with gloves, mask and social distancing. Then I return for New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's daily press briefing, when he updates us with pertinent facts, followed by personal reflections full of tough love and resolve. The battle between work and procrastination dominates my afternoons. If I can't concentrate well, I might alphabetise shelves of piano box-sets while listening to anything but piano music. With my health club closed, I've surrendered to learning yoga. My wife is an experienced practitioner, and she gives me a nightly lesson.

Aside from items on my reviewing docket and my broadcast playlists, I'm basically pulling down CDs and downloads at random, mostly to distract me as I cook and clean. Despite my piano-animal reputation, great singing has become both a refuge and a safety valve. Yesterday I did dishes to Verdi at the Met, specifically the 1935 *La traviata* where Rosa Ponselle's astounding vocalism raises the hairs on my back. So do Maria Callas's EMI studio recording of the Sleepwalking Scene from *Macbeth* and Frida Leider's genius 1928 Narration and Curse from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

I can't get enough of Rudolf Firkušný's magical collaborations with soprano Gabriela Beňačková in songs by Martinů, Janáček and Dvořák. Call me unsophisticated, but I still listen to Mario Lanza's *The Great Caruso* and *The Student Prince* soundtracks with great joy, just like I did as a toddler when my grandfather put them on the turntable. But comparing Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's

myriad Schubert *Winterreise* recordings seems less enticing these days than delving into the Grateful Dead's epic live versions of 'Dark Star' (two favourites: February 27, 1969, from Fillmore West and August 27, 1972, from Veneta, Oregon). After uploading all 300-plus episodes of *Gilbert Gottfried's Amazing Colossal Podcast* to the iPod, my mental images of orange wedges and the actor Cesar Romero have changed for ever.


Although New York is on pause, music refuses to keep quiet online. The Metropolitan Opera offers daily HD video streams, the New York Philharmonic launched a digital Mahler Festival, and Bang on a Can coordinated six hours of consecutive live music transmitted from performers' homes. The 92nd Street Y is presenting live streamed home concerts: one that I caught featured the brilliantly gifted composer/pianist Conrad Tao playing Frederic Rzewski's monumental variation set *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, a work whose title could not be more appropriate now.

The current crisis clearly demonstrates how the dynamics between enforced isolation and public outreach are in flux

My cohorts in the New York area's vast piano community post about the perils and pleasures of online teaching. They encourage subscribing to each other's YouTube pages,

while seeking ways to make their Facebook Live concerts profitable. However, sensitive listeners can't help but notice one common drawback to all of this activity: upon reopening, the busiest people on the block will be the piano tuners!

If anything, the crisis clearly demonstrates how the dynamics between enforced isolation and public outreach are in flux. Audiences have morphed from an anonymous collective to an aggregate of individuals whom artists might acknowledge by name at the end of a concert (click the 'like' button during a Chopin Nocturne and you're guaranteed a personal shout out). Our local arts publication *The Brooklyn Rail* hosts daily events with writers, visual artists and musicians that blur the boundaries between interviews, seminars and open forums. A noted recording engineer and pianophile friend of mine started a moderated discussion group on Zoom. For the first hour, participants from all over the world hold forth on selected topics such as our favorite recording of Liszt's B minor Sonata, memorable page-turning mishaps and influential teachers. Then we might listen to a recording and comment upon it.

In short, while social distancing compels us to distantly socialise, we achieve instant and intimate communion once music comes into play. Perhaps all of these activities represent a 21st-century manifestation of the 19th-century artist salon, as we look backwards and forwards at the same time, and build bridges to a new and hopefully better normal. 

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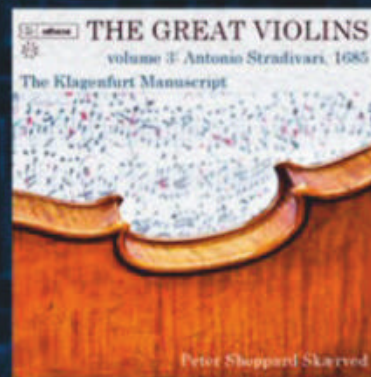
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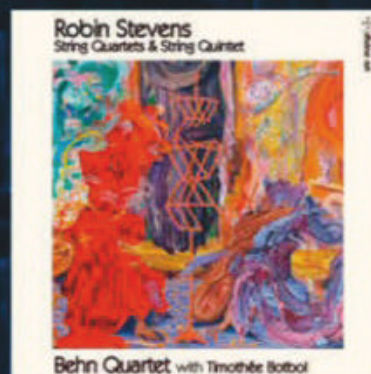


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A passionate commitment to keep connecting

You know those diary columns penned by socialites that drip with name-dropping? Well, here's mine. For what a month I've had. To highlight just a few A-list artists: I've popped in to some of pianist Igor Levit's daily house concerts; stopped by cellist Alisa Weilerstein's place where she's been playing the Bach Suites, one movement per day; and few hosts have proved quite as debonair as violinist Daniel Hope (and few living rooms proved quite so stylish), whose home has become a hangout for the most impressive of chamber music soirées, Hope@Home.

Of course in reality (and before anyone reports me to the authorities) I've barely brushed the borders of my postcode for more than a month now. All the above has been made possible by the passionate commitment of artists to keep communicating. Some of it has been of audiophile quality, some little more sophisticated than a webcam angled towards a photo frame-topped piano. What has united it all has been a wonderful spirit of generosity – and spontaneity.

Different nations' rules have posed contrasting challenges, but creativity has won out. One fun project saw members of the London Mozart Players recording their relevant bits of *Carnival of the Animals*, all subsequently sewn together. And there can't be many families who can observe lockdown laws *and* put on a chamber reduction of a movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3 – but this is exactly what the Kanneh-Mason household managed on the day pianist Isata was due to have performed the work at the Royal Albert Hall. Plus, as I write this, a life-affirming *Spem*



in Alium has arrived from Stile Antico, the 40 parts recorded on smartphones and spectacularly compiled.

But most moving of all was the Good Friday performance of Bach's *St John Passion* from St Thomas Church, Leipzig, where the composer had been cantor, and where he now rests. A suitably social distance-friendly chamber reduction was used within the church, while the broadcast cut to a screen-filling collage of postage stamp-sized singers for the chorales. Few moments have so poignantly captured the insistence, by so many, that even at a time of enforced separation, we shall be united by, and in, music.

Great artists have invariably found themselves placed on pedestals, but while some of the grandest (particularly in the past) may have adored the adulation, most I meet these days feel regretful about the distance fame imposes between them and their audiences, and they do everything they can to break down barriers. It's a pleasing paradox that it is at this time of division that many artists have arguably felt more personally connected to audiences than ever before. But when the likes of Levit, Weilerstein or Hope invite us virtually into their living rooms, in one crucial sense it's not so different to what they do when, in more normal times, they perform on a stage before audiences of thousands, or in a recording studio before a microphone. They're using music to connect with people. And when the concerts begin again, perhaps the openness, dedication and imagination they and so many have shown through these past weeks will live on, through that sense of connection being stronger even than before.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'It seems like it was a different world in which I met Piotr Beczala, at the buzzing Staatsoper in

Vienna,' says **HUGO SHIRLEY** who interviews the gregarious tenor about his new *verismo* album this issue. 'It was fascinating to talk technique and repertoire with a singer who loves what he does.'



'It is always a great pleasure for me to get my thoughts in order about a great string player of the past,' says

TULLY POTTER who writes this month's Icons feature. 'A violinist such as Arthur Grumiaux almost writes the piece himself, so closely is his playing aligned with his memorable personality.'



'I have admired Vyacheslav Artyomov's music ever since a chance encounter in a CD shop in

Brussels 20 years ago,' says our Contemporary Composers author **GUY RICKARDS**. 'The chance to bring his wonderful music to wider notice was an opportunity not to be missed.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra
Edward Gardner Chief Conductor

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Johannes Brahms German Requiem
with Camilla Tilling and Florian Bosch

Leos Janáček Glagolitic Mass
Igor Stravinsky The Rite of Spring
Max Bruch Violin Concerto with Johan Dalene
Eric Whitacre Deep Field
Edvard Grieg Peer Gynt
Arnold Schoenberg Gurre-Lieder

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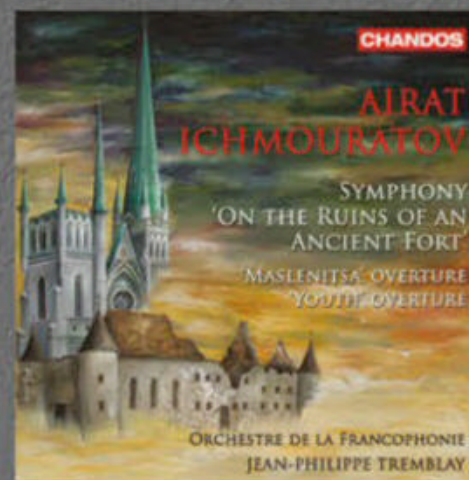


RECORDING OF THE MONTH MASSENET THAÏS

Erin Wall | Joshua Hopkins | Andrew Staples
Toronto Mendelssohn Choir
Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Sir Andrew Davis

Following acclaimed performances at the Edinburgh Festival and then in Melbourne, Sir Andrew Davis's recording features an outstanding cast led by Erin Wall in the title role.

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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



'VINCERÒ!'

Piotr Beczala *ten*
Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana / Marco Boemi
Pentatone

► **MARK PULLINGER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 26**

Tenor Piotr Beczala sings this delightful selection of arias with an engagingly openhearted spirit of humanity and drama, and most importantly a beautifully weighted, richly coloured voice.



ELGAR Violin Concerto
Nicola Benedetti *vn*
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski
Decca

One of today's top ambassadors for music off the platform, Nicola Benedetti is an equally inspiring one on it, her playing embracing Elgar's emotional depths.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 33**

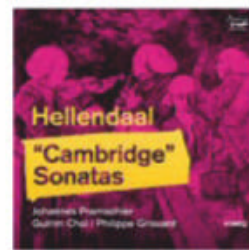


POULENC

Piano Concerto
Mark Bebbington *pf*
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Jan Latham-Koenig
Resonus

What a wonderful Poulenc journey pianist Mark Bebbington takes us on, always with a sense of passion and purpose.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**



HELLENDAAAL

Six 'Cambridge' Sonatas
Johannes Pramsohler *vn*
Gulrim Choï *vc* Philippe Grisvard *hpd*
Audax

The Dutch-born, English-based Baroque composer Pieter Hellendaal gets championed here in superb style by Johannes Pramsohler and colleagues.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**

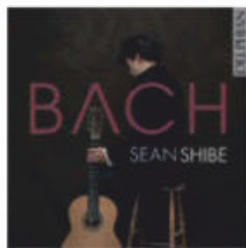


TELEMANN

'La querelleuse'
The Counterpoints
Etcetera
This is a sparkling debut album,

chamber and solo Telemann works alike – in a programme that speaks of real creative care – are all performed with life-affirming relish and flair.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



JS BACH

Guitar Works
Sean Shibe *gtr*
Delphian
The superb young guitarist – and this month's cover artist –

Sean Shibe's devotion to drawing a rich tapestry of colours from every impeccably played phrase makes this a Bach recital worthy of adding to everyone's collection.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



'THE LONG 17th CENTURY'

Daniel-Ben Pienaar *pf*
Avie
Like the best of those who perform early

music on piano, Daniel-Ben Pienaar makes these pieces – and what a generous offering he gives us – live and breathe with an almost contemporary sensibility.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



BEETHOVEN

An die ferne Geliebte
SCHUBERT
Schwanengesang
Roderick Williams *bar*
Iain Burnside *pf*
Chandos

The excellent Roderick Williams's ability to convey meaning with a personal touch makes for a memorable *Schwanengesang*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**

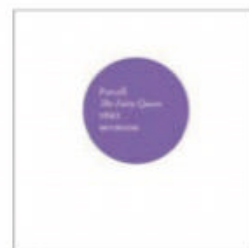


STRADELLA

San Giovanni Battista
Le Banquet Céleste / Damien Guillon
Alpha
The intense drama

of this 17th-century Biblical oratorio is vividly conveyed by an impressive line-up of singers and players under the astute direction of Damien Guillon.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



PURCELL

The Fairy Queen
Gabrieli Consort and Players / Paul McCreesh
Signum
Paul McCreesh often

offers thrillingly performed projects, and doesn't disappoint here: elegantly played, characterfully sung, Purcell's Shakespeare-inspired music is a joy.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



DVD/BLU-RAY

'THE ENGLISH ORGAN'

Daniel Moulton *orgs*
Fugue State Films
Fugue State Films offers another absolutely fascinating, lavish and lovingly put together historical and musical feast, which traces the English organ's story across 500 years.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

'PAUL VAN KEMPEN: COMPLETE PHILIPS RECORDINGS'

Paul van Kempen
Eloquence

Another in-depth exploration from Eloquence of a great artist's legacy on record – this time conductor Paul van Kempen, and his Phillips recordings.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**

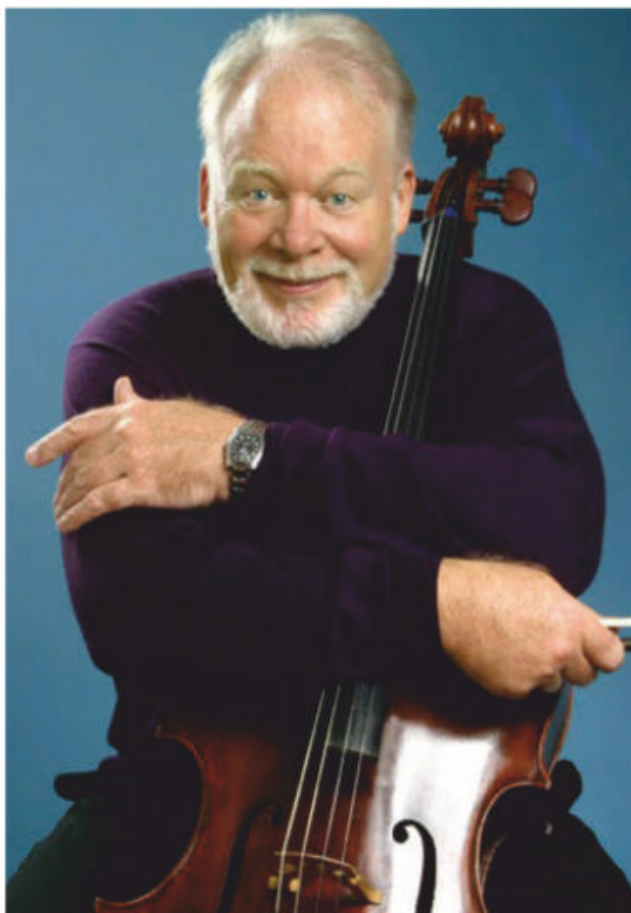
FOR THE RECORD

New York-born cellist Lynn Harrell has died

Lynn Harrell, who successfully made the leap from orchestral musician to top-flight soloist, has died at the age of 76. He was born in New York into a musical family: his father was the baritone Mack Harrell and his mother, Marjorie McAlister Fulton, a violinist. He studied at Juilliard (with Leonard Rose) and at Curtis (with Orlando Cole).

His parents both died when Harrell was young: his father in 1960 when Lynn was 15, and his mother in 1962 when he was 18. In an interview with Andrew Stewart in *Gramophone* in May 1994, he talked about his father's influence: 'My father was a great singer, but I wasn't aware of that until after he died. But then I would play along with, study and listen to small snippets of his recordings, over and over again, to see the meaning of his art. At times, that experience was often overpowering. I began to realise that it was possible to get a similar variety of attack with the bow as that possible from the human voice. Listening to records of singers became my inspiration fully for five or six years, and I then consciously attempted to extend the palette of sounds I could produce on the cello to rival those of the voice.'

In 1962, he joined George Szell's Cleveland Orchestra, becoming Principal Cello in 1964, a post he held until 1971. That year he made his solo debut in New York and his solo career was launched. He both performed and recorded extensively as a soloist (mainly for Decca) but also worked frequently in a trio with Vladimir Ashkenazy and Itzhak Perlman, with whom he recorded Beethoven's piano trios (for EMI); of the *Archduke*, Joan Chissell wrote: 'I thought the performance masterly. No three artists could be more sensitive in nuance or fastidious in



every detail of ensemble.' In addition, he recorded, again with Ashkenazy, the cello sonatas (for Decca), which the pianist himself chose to include complete in the Artist Choice box-set issued to celebrate his 80th birthday. Also among Harrell's extensive discography was a recording for DG of Taneyev's Piano Quintet (with Ilya Gringolts, Vadim Repin, Nobuko Imai and Mikhail Pletnev) which won *Gramophone's* Chamber Award in 2006. His catalogue embraced most of the cello concerto repertoire as well as numerous chamber music, and solo, recordings.

Among the tributes paid to Harrell, one came from violinist Nigel Kennedy, who recalled receiving a letter from the cellist 'expressing regret at my withdrawal from the classical world and generous admiration for the way I play ... This generous outreach was typical of Lynn and lead to us recording and touring duo repertoire for cello and violin ...

During our work, he displayed the incredible joy of music and of life. Always growing as an artist, what was even more important was the generosity, humility, honesty and openness epitomised by Lynn the man.' Their album of Bach, Handel/Halvorsen, Kodály and Ravel on EMI was rapturously received by Rob Cowan in 2000.

As Harrell's solo career slowed, he took on teaching posts at the Royal Academy of Music in London, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Juilliard, the USC Thornton School of Music in LA and Rice University. Harrell played a Montagnana cello from 1720 and then the 1673 Stradivarius cello owned previously by Jacqueline du Pré. Latterly he played on a modern instrument made by Christopher Dungey. *Lynn Harrell: born January 30, 1943; died April 27, 2020*

Proms plans remain uncertain

While many festivals throughout the world have already been cancelled in the wake of Covid-19, the BBC Proms – probably the biggest and most famous of them all – has only indicated that this year, its 125th, will inevitably be different to usual and delayed the launch of its programme. 'We are still hoping that the Proms will be part of the summer this year,' said the organisation, 'although that will involve adapting and changing the festival we originally planned.' Further details will be revealed shortly.

Concert tickets for NHS workers

As part of a country-wide outpouring of gratitude for National Health Service workers, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra will give 5000 concert tickets to workers in the NHS once concerts resume when the Covid-19 pandemic is over. Around 10 per cent of the CBSO Chorus members work for the NHS.

In London, meanwhile, St John's Smith Square launched a 'Pay It Forward' campaign to fund 500 concert tickets for NHS staff. The venue

has invited supporters to donate to a crowdfunder page in order to raise funds to provide free tickets to forthcoming concerts.

New Sony Classical A&R head

Alexander Buhr is joining Sony Classical to run the label's Berlin-based A&R operation and oversee the label's international A&R strategy. The newly created post – the full title is Senior Vice President, International A&R and Business Opportunities – will see him take on a roster of artists including such major musicians as conductor Teodor Currentzis, tenor Jonas Kaufmann and pianist Igor Levit. Until earlier this year, Buhr was Managing Director of the Decca Classical Label Group, where he signed leading young artists including soprano Lise Davidsen (*Gramophone's* 2018 Young Artist of the Year) and cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason. Throughout his career, which also included launching the Mercury KX label, projects which sit where musical genres meet has been a strong thread; he has, for example, worked with composer Ólafur Arnalds, singer-songwriter Tori Amos and sitar player Anoushka Shankar.

Learn music at home with the stars

With families confined to home, parents have turned to the web to find music education for their children (or even for themselves!).

Among these, BBC Ten Pieces – the long-running programme introducing children to classical music – launched ‘Ten Pieces at Home’, a 10-week series offering a new weekly film and activity based around a classical work.

Children can sing a section of Sibelius’s *Finlandia* alongside the BBC Singers, learn from BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra players in interactive musical activities, or take inspiration from Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* in ‘Music Memories’. For details, visit bbc.co.uk/teach/ten-pieces

More Elgar comes from violinist and leading classical music ambassador Nicola Benedetti, who set young players the challenge of learning *Salut d’amour*



Nicola Benedetti: violin ambassador

through a week of daily online lessons. What better complement could there be to her Editor’s Choice-winning album of the composer’s music (see review on page 33)? And throughout the rest of May her Foundation is offering free, live tuition, led by Benedetti and her team of tutors. Visit benedettifoundation.org for more information.

The Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, meanwhile, has launched ‘Creating Music at Home’, an online collection of creative music-making activities focusing on the world’s leading composers, with resources for both children with and without instruments. Drawing on themes such as superheroes, sounds in the house and garden, code and graphic scores, featured composers include John Cage, Cornelius Cardew and Berlioz. Get involved at resources.bcmg.org.uk/

ONE TO WATCH

The Counterpoints

When the recorder player Thomas Triesschijn and harpsichordist Aljosja Mietus formed a duo in their student days at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague – including self-releasing a Bach disc in 2015 – they were already envisaging a larger ensemble. With the violinist Matthea de Muynck and cellist Petr Hamouz they formed The Counterpoints, a core of musicians they imagined could expand depending on the repertoire. Following success at the York Early Music Young Artists’ Competition and the Göttingen Händel Competition, they have issued their first recording – a Telemann album called *La Querelleuse*, which traces the composer’s ‘quarrels’ with different national styles and the resultant stylistic mix found in his trio sonatas (see Mark Seow’s review on page 47).

All four musicians work regularly with leading period-instrument orchestras, including Les Talens Lyriques, Collegium 1704 and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, and pursue careers as soloists and chamber musicians. In the spirit of Dutch Early Music pioneers, they believe in performing on authentic instruments or the best copies



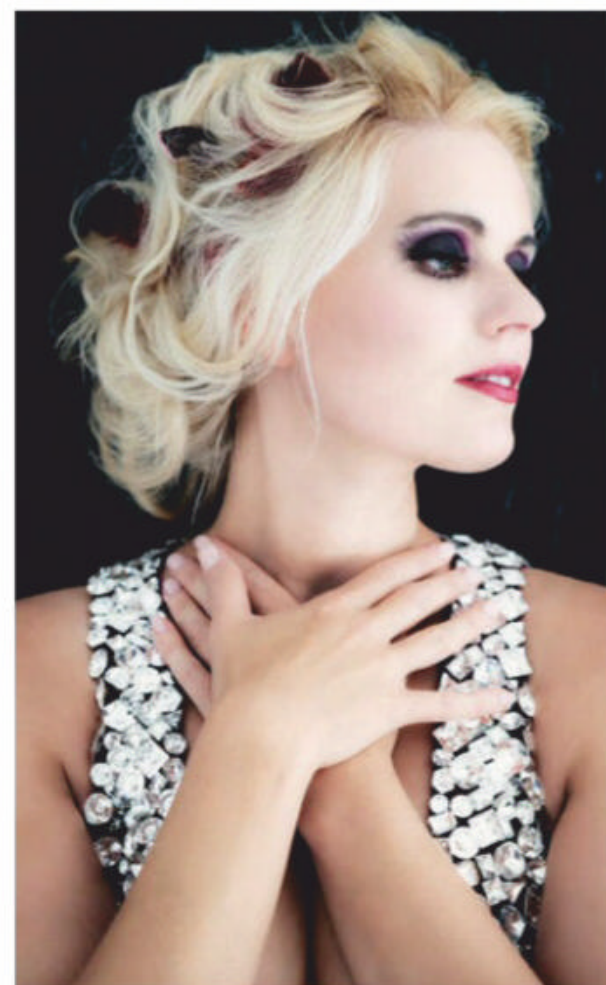
of contemporary instruments, and seek out refreshing ways of presenting Early Music to audiences. Recent and planned programmes explore the influences of Scottish and Irish folk-fiddle music on touring Italian Baroque virtuosos, and an audio-visual representation of 17th-century Dutch art, where the paintings are better known than the music. Let’s hope at least one of these makes it on to record – certainly more recordings are promised. Do look out for them.

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Podcasts

In this latest *Gramophone* podcast, Sarah Traubel talks to James Jolly about her debut for Sony Classical, entitled ‘Arias for Josepha’ and named after the soprano who created the role of the Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*. As well as exploring the programme and the composers represented, she talks about her time in lockdown and also about her two illustrious relatives.



Sarah Traubel appears on our Gramophone podcast

And in another new episode of the *Gramophone* podcast, James Jolly speaks to the Chief Conductor of the RLPO, Vasily Petrenko, who has been recording a series of major works by Sir Edward Elgar for Onyx.

Specialist Classical Chart

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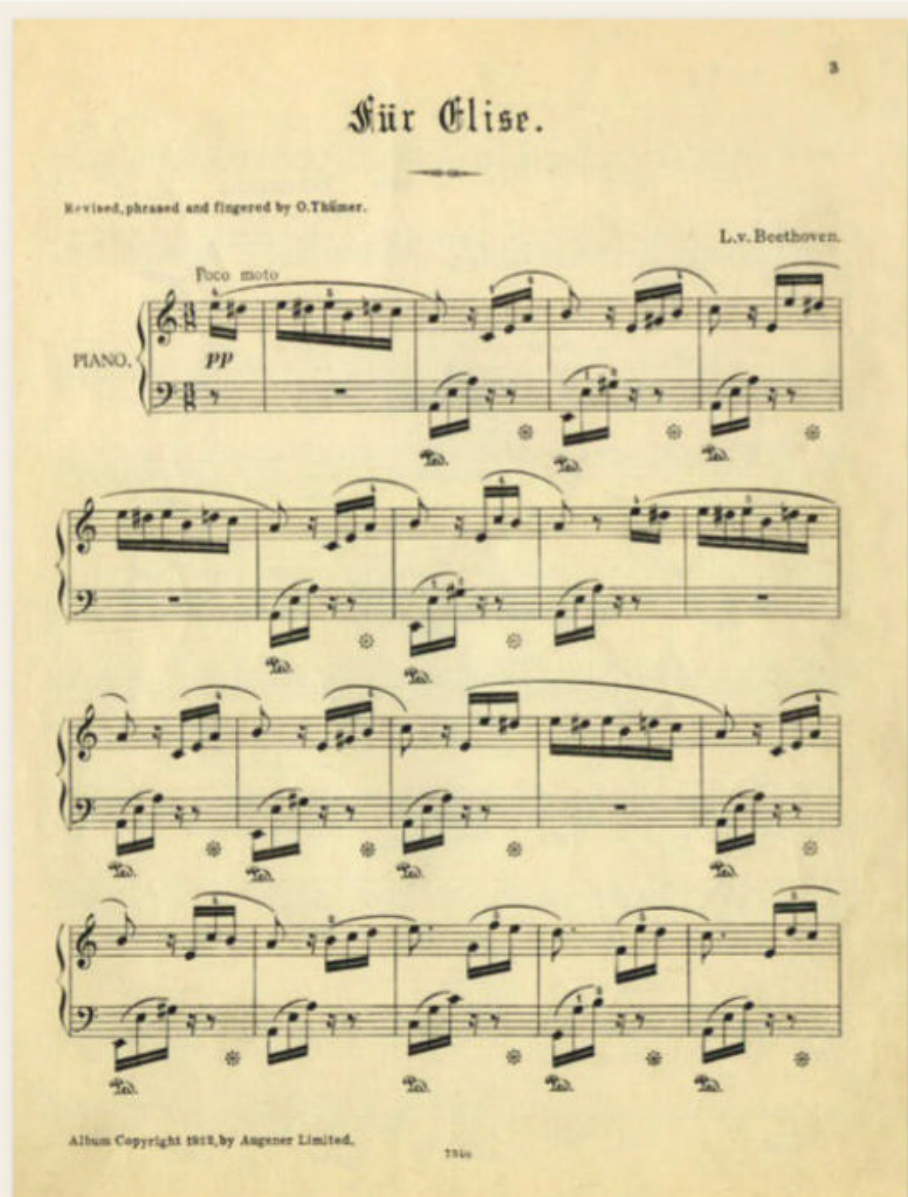
GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Bagatelle*

Richard Bratby explores how this 'trifle' of a thing expanded to encompass the world

It doesn't do to get too serious about a bagatelle. The earliest significant musical use of the term appears to have been by François Couperin in his *Ordre 10ème de clavecin* (1716-17): signifying a trifle, something small and of little importance. Beethoven used a German term with a near-identical meaning, *Kleinigkeiten*, to describe the tiny piano pieces he wrote throughout his life, and which were published as Bagatelles: Op 33 (1801-02), Op 119 (1820-22) and Op 126 (1824), as well as numerous one-off works (like that most celebrated of all piano miniatures, *Für Elise*) to which he never gave a formal title.

And that, for roughly a century, was that: Beethoven's publisher Peters described bagatelles as 'small things that make an effect', and there's a hint of playfulness – of sport – in the term, too. That was certainly the spirit in which, in May 1878, Dvořák wrote his *Maličkosti* (published as Bagatelles) for harmonium, two violins and cello, and in which Saint-Saëns wrote his Op 3 set (1855). Liszt's *Bagatelle sans tonalité* (1885) was originally conceived as the fourth *Mephisto Waltz* but was published with a name that served as a warning not to take its weirder implications too literally (and which it shared with the high-spirited eponymous heroine of Offenbach's 1874 operetta).

Yet, as an early critic of Beethoven's bagatelles once wrote, 'an infinite amount lies bewitched in their magic circle'. In the 20th century, the bagatelle's playfulness became a license to experiment, just as the restrictions of a miniature form served as an incentive to ever more concentrated and poetic expression. Sibelius's 16 piano bagatelles Opp 34 and 97 (1913-20) are very much in the Romantic tradition but in Webern's Six Bagatelles for string quartet Op 9 (1911-13) and Ligeti's for wind quintet (1953), as well as Finzi's Five Bagatelles for clarinet and piano Op 23 (1941-43) and Walton's five for guitar (1971),



Beethoven's Für Elise: one of several pieces he called 'Kleinigkeiten' ('Bagatelle')

each composer takes the title to imply something like a haiku: a miniature that contains a world.

Bartók's 14 Bagatelles Op 6 (1908) and Howard Ferguson's Op 9 set (1944), both for solo piano, and Friedrich Cerha's Bagatelles for string trio (2010) are anything but throwaway. And in 2015, John Zorn composed a five-hour sequence of 300 bagatelles for any combination of jazz, rock, folk or classical musicians. Performed as a set, they're little short of epic. The tiniest of forms has expanded to embrace the whole musical universe. An 'infinite amount' of music, indeed. **G**

Sony issues a Peter Serkin box

Sony Classical is issuing the Complete RCA Album Collection by Peter Serkin, under the RCA Red Seal imprint.

Serkin was enthusiastic about the prospect of collecting together his past recordings, and agreed to write a booklet note for the set, but sadly died on February 1 with the note unwritten. *Gramophone's* Jed Distler has contributed an informative essay.

Peter Serkin was both proud of his lineage – his father was the pianist Rudolf Serkin – and somewhat burdened by it. One way of coming to terms with his heritage was by ploughing his own furrow, particularly in terms of playing new music. The set contains his famed Messiaen recordings: *Visions de l'Amen* for two pianos with Yūji Takahashi, the *Quartet for the End of Time* with his chamber group Tashi, and his



1973 recording of *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*. Other recordings with Tashi are included, from Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert's *Trout* Quintet to Takemitsu, Webern and Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*. The set also contains the 16-year-old Serkin's recording with a similarly youthful Richard Goode of Busoni's two-piano *Fantasia contrappuntistica*.

The concerto recordings range from Bach and Mozart to Schoenberg and Bartók. The solo albums encompass Serkin's Chopin and Beethoven, and above all his Bach: the set contains two of Serkin's five commercial recordings of the *Goldberg Variations*, a work that triumphantly bookended his career. This 35-disc box is issued on May 29, and will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of *Gramophone*.

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Stephen Farr on playing Bach on the 1730 Trost organ of Waltershausen

“We wanted to use an instrument of a design philosophy that would have been familiar to Bach, and this is actually by a builder – Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost – whose work he knew personally. The *Orgelbüchlein* constitutes 45 mainly short works, and presents an interesting conundrum – Bach would never have expected them to have been played end to end, so you’re essentially forced into a scenario where you want to have the maximum possible tonal variety but at the same time avoid going crazy with ludicrous combinations and eccentric sonority. But the Trost organ has this range of colour – wonderful flutes and principals, and very characteristic string stops and soft reeds – so it has a broad palate to draw on (though of relatively muted colours, so there’s nothing extravagantly psychedelic about it).

Most modern organs are designed to a fairly standard set of dimensions, but not in this period. So each time you go to a historical instrument you’re essentially relearning your spatial approach, and sometimes your technical approach too. At Waltershausen the key actions of the manuals are completely different to each other in terms of weight and depth and in the amount of physical address required to make them speak. When you couple them together the weight is really quite extraordinary and you find yourself having to play with a little bit more arm – if you just play completely from the fingers it’s exhausting.

The pedal board is enormously wide – probably about 50 percent wider in total than



a modern equivalent. The bottom of the pedal board is extraordinarily heavy – it requires a really conscious sense of effort and physical propulsion. And the bench can’t be adjusted up or down, or in or out – you just have to sit where you sit. So if you play the instrument for an extended period of time it is really tiring. But the sound, of course, completely compensates for any amount of inconvenience!

Inevitably all of this has an effect on the way you can play. It’s not an instrument you can play really, really fast, and you find yourself having to rethink certain aspects of tempo and articulation in the light of what it is telling you. For example, with one of the Christmas preludes, *Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar*, I played it a little slower than I usually do because of the sheer physicality of the instrument. And I started to see all kinds of things I’d never previously noticed – little subtleties and nuances. The instrument allows you to take in more of the musical scenery.

We thought long and hard about how much of the mechanical noise of the instrument to eliminate on the recording, and in the end we decided we would leave in all but the most obtrusive of sounds. There’s no point going to the very considerable trouble of recording on one of these instruments if you’re going to sanitise the experience – these little thuds and creaks are an important part of the organ’s sonic landscape.”

Stephen Farr’s recording, on Resonus, of Bach’s Orgelbüchlein is reviewed next issue

Tasmin Little’s legacy recording

Last year, British violinist Tasmin Little announced that – after a career spanning three decades, resulting in more than 40 recordings and 2000 concerts – she would be retiring this summer. To mark the moment, Chandos – her label since 2010 – invited her to select her favourite recordings for a two-CD ‘Best of Tasmin’ release, out in June.

The first disc features concertos – including both Walton’s and Britten’s, with Edward Gardner – while the second offers Vivaldi, Brahms, Shostakovich and *The Lark Ascending*. The violinist has now said that, in the light of Covid-19 cancellations, she has postponed her final bow until the end of the year. Meanwhile, her new album of British Violin Sonatas (Vol 3) with Piers Lane is reviewed on page 48.



that starts in September. Currently Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Principal Guest Conductor of the Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin, she debuted with the LPO in October 2018 in Sibelius, Dvořák and Bartók. Initially a violinist – she played with the Chicago SO and the Bergen Philharmonic – her decision to focus on conducting was validated by her receipt of the 2016 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award. Her first concert in post, in October, will pair Beethoven’s Symphony No 8 with John Adams’s *Absolute Jest*.

YCAT extends support in crisis

Like most musicians at this time of crisis, those belonging to the prestigious Young Classical Artists Trust scheme have seen across-the-board performance cancellations. The charity, which supports artists in the early stages of their careers, boasts such illustrious alumni as tenor Ian Bostridge, the Belcea Quartet, trumpeter Alison Balsom, pianist James Baillieu and guitarist Sean Shibe; current artists include recorder player Tabea Debus and viola player Timothy Ridout. When lockdown began, YCAT initially gave each of its artists £250 but also launched a hardship fund. Within three weeks the £5000 target had been smashed and an extraordinary £100,000 had been given by the charity’s supporters.

Canellakis awarded LPO role

American conductor Karina Canellakis has been named as the new Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, a role

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The Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra is a fascinating anomaly in the music life of the Nordic countries. It is the national orchestra of Sweden yet lies on the opposite side of the country to Stockholm and is owned by its local council. Despite its association with Wilhelm Stenhammar (or perhaps because of it; Stenhammar always put other people's music above his own) it became the one ensemble Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius looked to for support and understanding. As a result, it will always be associated with those composers, from countries lying to Sweden's south and east.

The appointment of Finnish conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali in 2017 came about, in part, from a desire to cultivate Nordic repertoire once more. But Rouvali's appointment also proved the second instance of the GSO gambling on youth and apparently winning. A decade earlier, the orchestra had handed the same job to one Gustavo Dudamel.

Neither Dudamel nor Rouvali would deny what a technically fine ensemble they had inherited – from Mario Venzago, but chiefly from Neeme Järvi, principal conductor for 22 years and the musician who brought the orchestra to the world, courtesy of labels BIS, DG and Chandos. There's no doubting that Dudamel brought fire to what could be (for Scandinavia) a decidedly grand orchestral sound (and surely nobody taps into the orchestra's deep-rooted grandeur better than regular visitor Herbert Blomstedt), nor that Rouvali has engendered rhythmic snap and a more pronounced tendency to feel the music in the moment. Reviewing the first volume of Rouvali's Sibelius cycle for Alpha Classics, Edward Seckerson noted that the GSO had 'rarely sounded so committed' (3/19). And all these facets are illuminated



inside 'the crab', the orchestra's concert hall on Götaplatsen – a masterpiece of functionalist Scandinavian architecture.

Not since the heyday of the social democratic movement that saw that structure built in 1935 has the GSO been more determined to let everyone see inside it and experience performances. It inaugurated its fusion Point Music Festival in 2019, welcoming artists of many disciplines into the building for day-long celebrations of music in all forms. Its webcasting service GSoplay is second only to Berlin's Digital Concert Hall and entertains tens of thousands who have never even been to Sweden. As I write this under strict quarantine in Denmark, GSoplay has ensured the orchestra will reach even more, initiating twice-weekly concerts released for broadcast just as audiences would normally be filling its hall. **Andrew Mellor**

BBC musical postcards

As part of the BBC virtual arts festival 'Culture in Quarantine', Radio 3 asked 20 composers to respond to the current crisis with 30-second musical messages of hope. The resulting 'Postcards from Composers' – which began with Belle Chen, and now includes contributions by Jonny Greenwood and Sir James MacMillan – were recorded by players from BBC orchestras for broadcast across the station's programmes. Meanwhile, 12-18 year-olds were also invited to submit 30-second works, the best of which will be broadcast on Radio 3's *New Music Show*.



MacMillan: sending hope

Leipzig's online Bach Passion

In a moving Good Friday event that caught the imagination of the global music community – and not least readers on *Gramophone's*

website – the Leipzig Bach Festival live-streamed the composer's St John Passion from St Thomas Church, the composer's own church where he is also buried. A chamber version of the work was used, which called for tenor, harpsichord, organ and percussion; to this core ensemble were added five singers along with, via video link, artists and choirs due to have been performing at the 2020 festival, while the scores for the chorales were published online for any member of the public to join in. The resulting event has now been viewed half-a-million times across 76 countries, and raised £20,000 for freelance musicians.

Mervyn King role at Philharmonia

The former Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King – now Lord King of Lothbury – has been appointed chairman of London's Philharmonia Orchestra. A lifelong lover of classical music, King was an early interviewee in *Gramophone's* regular My Music feature back in 2005. In that interview, he talked about his love of Richard Strauss, and chose Carlos Kleiber's DG recording of Beethoven Symphony No 7 with the Vienna Philharmonic as his 'recording he couldn't live without'.

FROM WHERE I SIT

Beethoven's vocal writing, in *Fidelio* especially, isn't earthbound – it's cosmic, says Edward Seckerson




I want to reopen the debate on Beethoven and the voice. And particularly with regard to *Fidelio*, which I caught at the Royal Opera House. To say that the reviews for Tobias Kratzer's interesting new staging were decidedly Marmite might be deemed a colossal understatement, but this is an opera which has always struggled with its theatrical identity – part domestic drama, part political statement – and the loftier part of that equation (you might even call it a 'game of two halves') has inevitably been hijacked by directors seeking to adopt it as the ultimate in 'cry freedom' agitprop. For sure, there is no denying that the final chorus, the alternative 'ode to joy', is monumentally liberating, its syncopations quite literally cutting across, indeed breaking down, traditional bar lines. Its communal fervour renders any staging almost superfluous.

I actually think that Tobias Kratzer had something important to say with his Royal Opera production and, without going into details, did so by juxtaposing the 'traditional' with the contemporary, and by cleverly challenging our voyeuristic complicity in the politics of oppression. Florestan's dungeon became a kind of exhibit or installation, something to provoke outrage rather than action.

But I return to Beethoven and the voice. There are awkwardnesses here that even the likes of Lise Davidsen and Jonas Kaufmann could not disguise or indeed make light of – though Davidsen came close to giving the lie to that theory and despatching the crazy tessitura and impossible runs and groupings of 'Abscheulicher!' (drama before singability) with astonishing accuracy and resolve. Leonore is famously a role that sits between mezzo and soprano and has been beloved and feared by both.

When I was a teenager I blagged a ticket for one of the few performances that the great Christa Ludwig gave of the role before realising that the final scene which has her and Florestan thanklessly hammering away at the top of the stave was too unforgiving to keep in her repertoire. This performance, at the Salzburg Festival under Karl Böhm, rendered me speechless for about an hour after the final chorus had blown away all rational thinking. Consider other names in that cast: Edith Mathis, James King, and (I can hardly believe) Hans Hotter as Don Fernando.

The point is that Beethoven writes 'instrumentally' for the voice – and the spirit conveyed by the words sometimes pays little heed to the role that breathing plays in the articulation of the notes therein. Even poor Marzelline has some impossibly breathy runs – to convey her infatuation with Fidelio and frustration with Jaquino, perhaps? And the wild tessitura of the climax of Florestan's 'Gott! Welch Dunkel hier' has less to do with singing and more to do with an almost animalistic venting.

But there is the simple quiet ecstasy of the canonic quartet 'Mir ist so wunderbar' where I always recall the great William Mann's description of the moment where music 'below stairs' becomes the music of the angels. In short, Beethoven's 'voicings' are not, and never were, 'of this earth'. Think Beethoven, think cosmic. 

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RSK NAXOS

Musical EXPLORER

From sublime Bach to electric angst, guitarist Sean Shibe's ambitions for both himself and his instrument know no borders, as he tells **Martin Cullingford**

Follow an artist for a period of time, through performances, studio sessions and a spot of socialising, and the chances are that you'll end up with a rich portrait of a creative spirit. Few artists, though, would produce a portrait quite so psychedelically diverse as that hurled at the canvas by a season in the life of Sean Shibe: a season that takes us from exquisitely fragile folk songs, to an ear-shattering electric epic delivered in a costume of fabulous flamboyance, via sublime Bach sessions in an isolated church nestling in nature, south-east of Edinburgh.

Perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise. The front cover of Shibe's *Gramophone* Award-winning recording 'softLOUD', our inaugural Concept Album winner last year, presented a musician of multi-faceted foundations – classical/electric, historic/modern. In fact, it splits the guitarist, and the musical world and wider hinterland that he inhabits, right down the middle. I suspect the programme did something similar to its audience, though to ride its compelling journey from traditional Scottish music, via Steve Reich's mesmeric *Electric Counterpoint*, to the angry thrust of David Lang's *Killer*, is to experience not a dichotomy, but a richly woven, provocative, highly thought-provoking recital.

Interviewing Shibe can be a little like that too. Questions are often met by a thoughtful silence, before an answer, voiced in his gentle Scottish lilt and balanced between erudition and introspection, gathers steady speed, takes wing, soars somewhere sometimes wonderfully unexpected, before swiftly landing with a self-deprecating caveat, or occasionally a playfully devilish glint.

I first interviewed the guitarist several years ago at his then-home in north London, for a podcast about his beautiful Delphian debut of English guitar works, 'Dreams & Fancies'. It was on leaving – following a fascinating discussion with many delightful detours, taking in everything from sound quality to the place of guitar in modern society, via the works we were supposed to be discussing, Dowland, Walton, Arnold, Berkeley, Britten – that I first spotted his electric guitar propped up in the next room, his relationship with the instrument still in its early days, though set to bear extraordinary fruit.

This time around, however, we're sitting down for lunch in an East Lothian castle which once served as a holiday retreat

to Mary Queen of Scots, not far from home turf for the Edinburgh-born artist. The open fire and stag's heads create a strongly Scottish atmosphere as we discuss the just-finished sessions for Shibe's new album of Bach lute suites. Having watched him all morning making the most sensitive of decisions about interpretation and performance, it's amusingly ironic that, when we come to order drinks, decisiveness deserts him and, following an inclusive back and forth about the wine list, he ends up opting for a beer.

But that's OK. For the sessions really were a privilege to witness. Crichton Collegiate Church, where they took place, is about 7.5 miles outside Edinburgh, but may as well be 75 miles. Sitting in tranquil mid-Lothian landscape, it dates from the 15th century and fared somewhat precariously through the politics and religious upheavals of the intervening half millennium, but survived to be beautifully restored relatively

recently. It's now beloved by musicians, not least artists on Delphian, a label with a firm commitment to exceptional recorded sound. Small in stature, the space feels just right for the intimacy of

Bach's lute suites, perfectly proportioned to gently cradle their fragility and their strength, to let the colours bloom and the themes to dance delicately in the air. On this cold winter's morning, the surrounding frozen fields silent, the experience was almost meditative: the world stilled, nothing disturbing this most profound music. Shibe sat alone in the nave flanked by two electric heaters, a model of poise, while, in a small vestry, those of us in the makeshift control room observed a library-like intensity. Talking between takes almost felt like an intrusion.

Bach's lute suites, now a pivotal part of the guitar repertoire, have ambiguous origins in terms of what instrument they were actually composed for. Originally written in two-stave keyboard style rather than lute tablature, many scholars think some of these works were actually written for the lautenwerck, a lute-harpsichord, two examples of which Bach owned. Whatever the truth, they're now most often heard played on the guitar – a modern manifestation of these 18th-century masterpieces that seems sublimely to unlock their soul. And while we often gather them as a group – despite their having been composed across a 30-year period – Shibe is convinced they have distinct and different characters. 'For sure – it's easy to think, especially when one is younger, of all works by Bach as uncompromisingly

'It's easy to think of all works by Bach as uncompromisingly spiritual, but there is a different spiritual emphasis to each one'





Wrapped up against the elements: alone in the nave of Crichton Collegiate Church, Shibe explores the spiritual dimensions of Bach's lute suites

spiritual in every instance – and of course in a way they are – but at the same time there is a different spiritual emphasis to each one.'

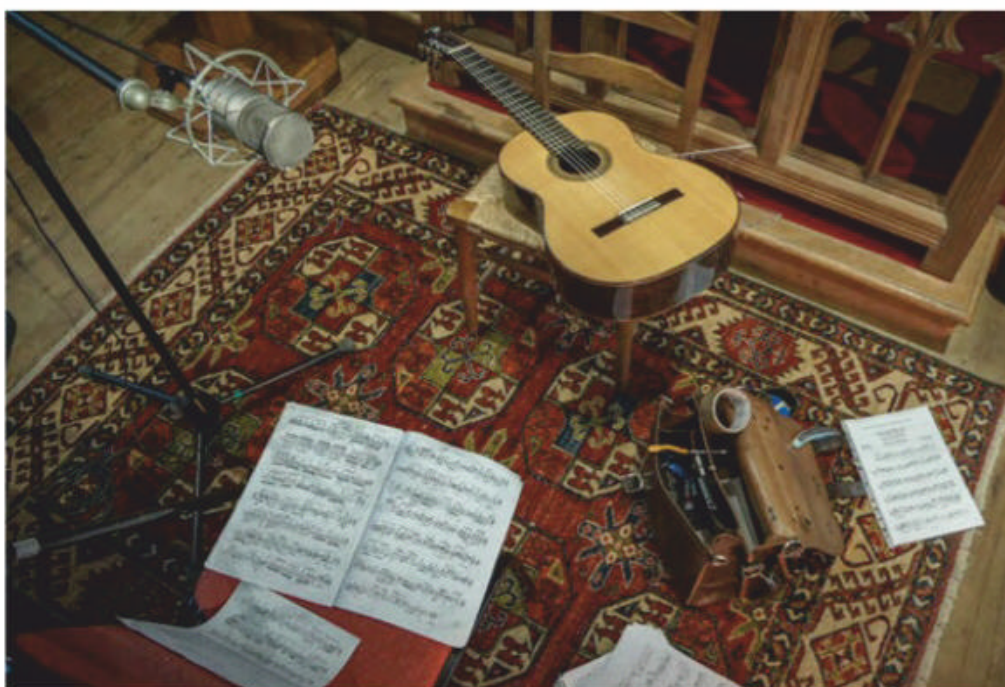
The three works on his new album are the youthful Lute Suite in E minor, BWV996, its six movements based on classical dances, and two works from much later in Bach's life, the C minor Partita, BWV997, and the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat, BWV998. Starting our discussion in the middle, Shibe sees BWV997 as infused with 'a yearning, suffering, melancholic chromaticism', while the theological depth of BWV998 is reflected in 'its potentially Trinitarian form, and also the crucifix form of it, in terms of the Fugue being twice as many bars as the Prelude or Allegro on either side'. As for the melodic fragments of BWV996, Shibe is drawn to their particular quality: 'Yeah, I feel a heroism in them, but maybe that's because I'm young, you know!'

'But even when I was younger, at that point we were still to an extent treating Bach as something so precious that it must

almost be played as if every note is hewn from a rock. Which means that other aspects of these pieces, the chaos of some of his compositions, the virility of some of it as well, were left aside. I think there are aspects of this, the more unusual moods, or moods that we might not initially associate with Bach, that the guitar, in my biased opinion, is a great advocate for, because it has that element of chaos in it – the fact that every string on the guitar sounds so unique and immediately definable is at once its weakness and its strength; there are so many colours, so many noisy, strange sounds that at some point you want

to get rid of but at other points you really want to encourage. Villa-Lobos loved the sounds of the scrape of the flesh on the strings, the squeak of it – he thought it was an innate musical demonstration of the guitar's soul.'

Shibe quotes something the pianist Igor Levit said about Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, that 'at a certain point in that piece he felt there was a demonstration of effort that one should make more of a *thing* of. And



The world stilled: observing the Bach sessions was an almost meditative experience



Crichton Collegiate Church, located 7.5 miles outside Edinburgh, dates from the 15th century and was recently restored; it has become a go-to venue for Delphian artists

I feel with the guitar, at certain points, there is a reason for that kind of effort. And so those extraneous noises, that buzz, or the overplaying when a string rattles against itself – and I guess that's a similar kind of effort that one would display when playing piano and a note really crashes out – there's a time and place for all that. Maybe it's when you're young that you can appreciate this. But I found there was a new kind of joy for me to discover, in terms of the ugly sounds that we don't associate with aesthetically controlled playing, that I wanted to explore.'

I'm struck by the extent to which this duality in the instrument mirrors so much in these very suites – the young, the joyous, juxtaposed with sections suffused in reflectiveness. The sound of the guitar, its colours, its chaos (as Shibe puts it), is something his playing explores and exploits wonderfully. In Shibe's hand the guitar is every bit as much a box of vibrating wood and strings as it is as an instrument capable of expressing the transcendent – and, sometimes, the simply sheerly beautiful. I mention a particular passage in the Allemande of BWV996, the repeat of the descending line in the first full bar, in which Shibe seems to almost float the notes mystically in the air, as if they're entirely unencumbered by anything so prosaic as physical contact with finger or fret. (I later sat down with Apple Music, listening to version after version by other guitarists, and nobody comes even vaguely close to offering something so exquisite at that particular point.) 'It's a very deliberate decision and it takes

'It takes a lot of practice to get that sound out – it's really, really tricky to make things sound effortless and childlike'

a lot of practice to get that sound out,' he replies. 'I feel that's a point at which, when you can use that colour, it can sound effortless and weightless – but of course the reality is anything but. It's really, really tricky to make things sound effortless and childlike, that's the oxymoron.'

What the 28-year-old Shibe also shares with Levitt is that they've committed solo Bach, works so often deified as the pinnacle of the repertoire, to the studio relatively early in their recording careers. Others did it earlier still of course (and few

would describe the 17-year-old Hilary Hahn's Bach on the violin as being anything other than extraordinary) but for many, inhibited perhaps by that notion of monumentality, they put Bach aside for the

future. Is there a point in one's life, I ask, when one feels ready to approach Bach – 'At every point, surely?' Shibe cuts in. 'That absolutely must be.' He reaches for another musician, on another instrument, by way of example. 'That's what I liked about Philip Higham, when he released the Bach Cello Suites – he had a really nice liner note and he makes the point that if he left it for 20 years it would become unapproachable. Of course, there are exceptions, people who manage to approach them later in life in a really compelling way, like David Watkin: his record is fantastic. But this problem is particularly pronounced with guitarists. With violinists, obviously there are the solo works, but actually there are a lot of ways for violinists to get into Bach, such as orchestral playing, which means you have

access to that music – but for us guitarists there's just not so much, so these works are especially precious, especially in the context of the deficit of really amazing music that exists for our instrument.'

Ah yes, the guitarist's lot in life. Bypassed by most of the canonical composers of the Classical and Romantic era, once you step away from Baroque it's not until the 20th century, thanks to the likes of Villa-Lobos and the commitment to commissioning shown by Julian Bream and others, that we see some of the greatest composers of other genres also leaving their legacy for this instrument. Undaunted, Shibe is already setting about expanding the repertoire further.

'Oh, we have such cool things lined up!' he says, positively beaming as he lists them to me – and I note that electric guitar is a thread throughout, including, from Lliam Paterson, a young Scottish composer Shibe met at Aberdeen City Music School, settings of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* for classical and electric guitar and King's College Choir, and currently set for a release in 2022.

This passion for both Bach (or earlier still) and the music of our own day – leaving out much of what came in between – is characteristic of Shibe's programming. 'I certainly feel that in my career I have focused on the contemporary and 20th century – and the early. It's mostly because I find the vast amount of third-rate music written by guitarist-composers from the Romantic and Classical periods currently unapproachable. At this point in my life, I just don't have the mindset to be playing 20-minute variations on themes of Rossini by Giuliani, least of all six of them – it just does my head in!' And so, when he was just 19, having graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, he 'tapped out of' the predictable, more familiar, path taken by most classical guitarists through competitions and consequent concerts. 'It was the natural conclusion of wanting to play things like Britten's *Nocturnal*, and a lot of Bach, and more outrageous contemporary stuff, which means that you have to pursue other avenues.' It didn't hold him back. In the following year Shibe became the first guitarist appointed to the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists scheme, was awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, joined the Young Classical Artists Trust and signed to Delphian. He describes himself as feeling 'sort of shocked' that it's all worked out. 'I feel like I've become the artist that I wanted to be when I was younger. And now I'm working out what to do for the next stages. I'm so grateful for where my training has led me; I literally couldn't be happier with the career that I have.' He cites his *Gramophone* Award for 'softLoud' as 'a sign that it's OK Sean, you're doing the right thing, just chill out...'

'Outrageous contemporary stuff' might aptly apply to the last work I heard Shibe perform before writing this feature – George Lentz's *Ingwe* for solo electric guitar, the second half of his Wigmore Hall debut

'I feel like I have become the artist that I wanted to be when I was younger. I couldn't be happier with the career I have'

in early March. (It was actually the last recital I saw prior to the spread of Covid-19 which closed concert halls; with hindsight, perhaps a piece grappling with spiritual loneliness and the concept of the abyss wasn't entirely inappropriate.) Learning the extraordinary score – which, aside from fiendish musical and technical demands, requests 'expressive body language ... *Ingwe* must be played as though your life depended upon it' – saw Shibe spend 10 hours workshoping it with Lentz himself. It was a performance of awe-inspiring commitment, even down to the vivid red jumpsuit costume (which I thought reminiscent of David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust era, though in the fascinating and witty post-show discussion Shibe opted for '1970s Power Ranger' as a description). Lasting an hour, a series of ear-assaultingly loud sections ('*ff* must be deafeningly loud!' demands the score) nestle, wrestle even, against passages of

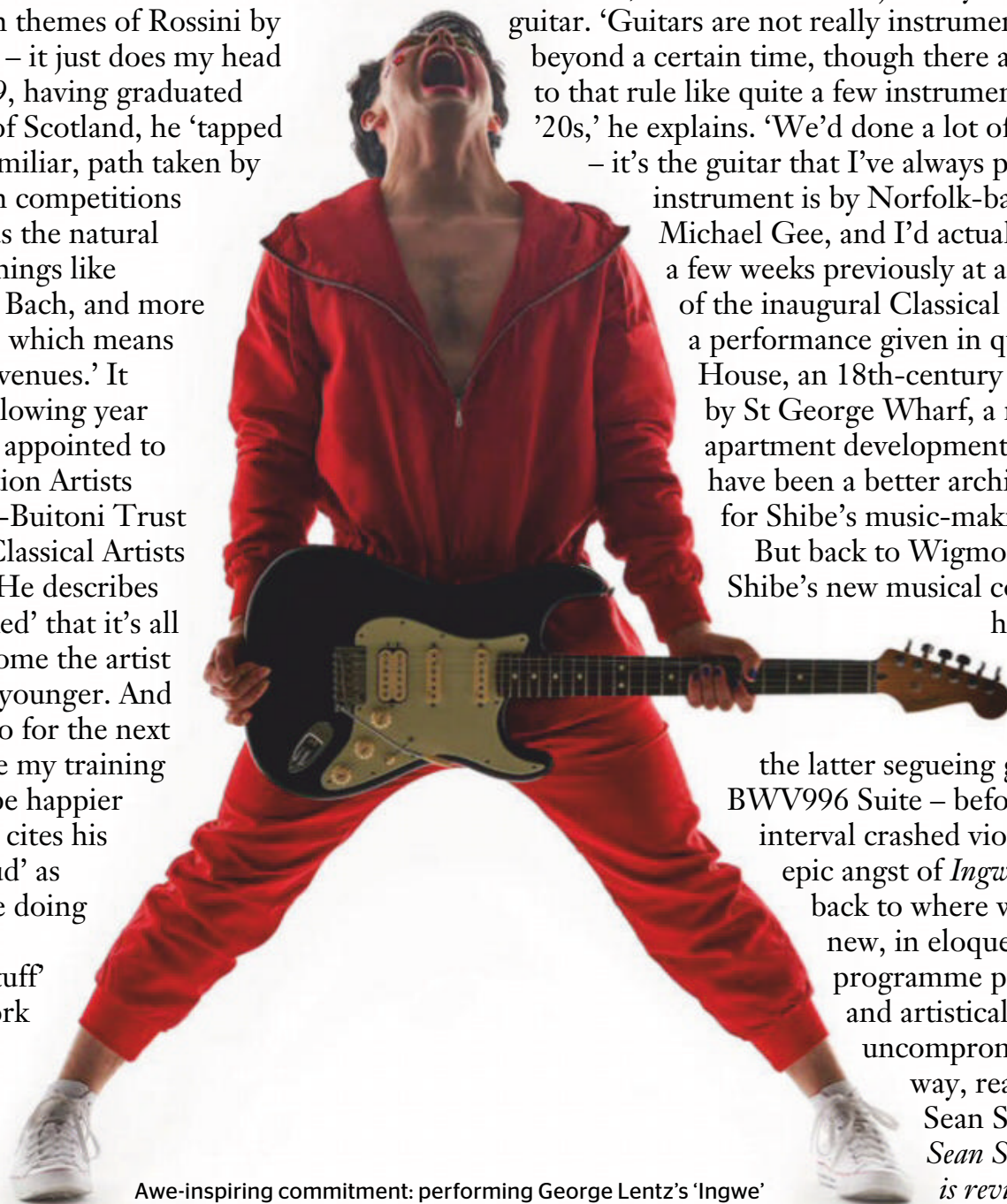
moving, meditative fragility. I think I've only ever heard the electric guitar at significant volume, and the delicacy of which this icon of modern musical power is capable came as a somewhat haunting,

disconcerting revelation. The impact reminded me of the first time I saw Jacob Epstein's *Torso in Metal* from 'The Rock Drill', in which an object of thrusting modernity is strikingly, and movingly, rendered vulnerable, human and humane.

The first half of the Wigmore recital was on classical guitar, though even then of mainly modern music, and in fact played on a brand-new instrument. Shibe's Bach album had, it turns out, been 'the end of a journey' with his previous guitar. 'Guitars are not really instruments that mature beyond a certain time, though there are exceptions to that rule like quite a few instruments from the '20s,' he explains. 'We'd done a lot of work together – it's the guitar that I've always played.' His new instrument is by Norfolk-based luthier Michael Gee, and I'd actually heard its debut a few weeks previously at a concert as part of the inaugural Classical Vauxhall festival, a performance given in quirky Brunswick House, an 18th-century mansion enveloped by St George Wharf, a modern mega apartment development. Could there have been a better architectural metaphor for Shibe's music-making?

But back to Wigmore Hall, where Shibe's new musical companion was heard in two modern works by David Fennessy and Sofia Gubaidulina,

the latter segueing gently into Bach's BWV996 Suite – before the calm of the interval crashed violently into the epic angst of *Ingwe*. And so we're back to where we began – old and new, in eloquent dialogue, in a programme personal, exploratory and artistically completely uncompromising. Not a bad way, really, to describe Sean Shibe himself. **G** *Sean Shibe's Bach album is reviewed on page 52*



Awe-inspiring commitment: performing George Lentz's 'Ingwe'



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Little did I imagine that less than four weeks after meeting Piotr Beczała at the Vienna Staatsoper, the Polish tenor would be singing to the world from Joyce DiDonato's New York apartment. After the Metropolitan Opera's revival of *Werther* was cancelled shortly before opening, Beczała became just one of myriad high-profile artists to seek alternative outlets during the Corona shutdown, to show their artistry up close and unvarnished. Occurring so soon after I'd met him in interview, this gesture came as no surprise: Beczała might be one of the world's leading tenors, but he also exudes a down-to-earth honesty and openness, not to mention a clearly undimmed love and passion for what he does.

He was performing for a very different crowd the evening before we met, having stepped in to serenade the *Schlagobers* of Viennese society and celebrity at the Vienna Opera Ball. It clearly went well, and he seems relaxed the following afternoon as we sit in an expansive Staatsoper meeting room. He has a few days off ahead of him, he tells me, and an evening agenda consisting of nothing more than a steak dinner – including the

French, through German and Italian to Czech, Russian and, of course, Polish works – are carefully and strategically woven together and built up, and he never loses sight of what's technically advisable and possible. Last year saw him tackle Cavaradossi (*Tosca*) and Maurizio (*Adriana Lecouvreur*) for the first time; Loris (*Fedora*) and Calaf (*Turandot*) are in the diary, with the latter slated for the modestly proportioned Zurich Opera House in two and a half years. 'I'm planning so many years into the future that I can manage this,' he tells me. 'I just started to think about developing in this kind of direction. But not changing: I'm still going to be singing in *Lucia*, and even *Lensky*.'

Indeed, Beczała clearly has no plans to abandon the youthful elegance that has been his trademark for more than two decades, and he's amused by the fact that the new album still includes a role from his early career. 'We have Rinuccio [from *Gianni Schicchi*], which I sang 20 years ago, and then all this heavy stuff like *Pagliacci*. But I don't really want to sing that like a Franco Corelli or Giuseppe Giacomini. I'm not a "verismo tenor".' Instead, Beczała says, he's looking back to an earlier age. 'When I recorded this,

'Verismo is so dangerous – so is Wagner. You can start to scream, because you have to use that part of the voice. But there's still a lot of lyrical singing – it's really connected'

rare treat of a glass of wine. We're here primarily to discuss his new album on Pentatone, and he has reason to be happy in that regard, too: he declares himself pleased with the latest edits.

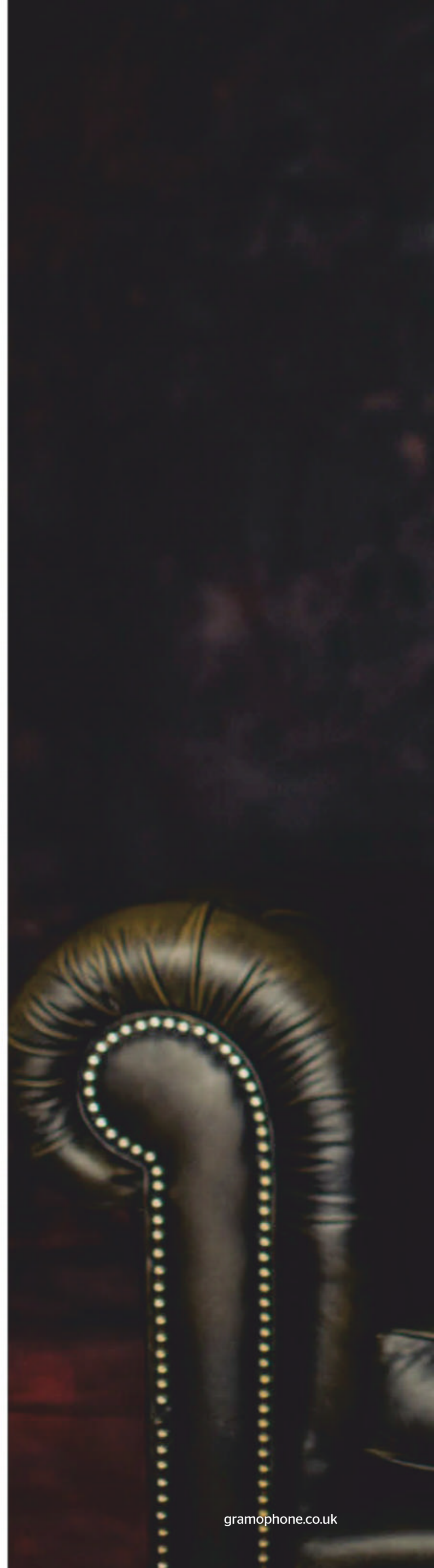
Beczała's deal with Gramophone's 2019 Label of the Year was announced as far back as January 2018. Why, then, is this first album being released only now? As far as excuses go, Beczała has a good one. The recording was initially scheduled for the summer of 2018, but there was the small matter of having to step in, at late notice, to the Bayreuth Festival's new production of *Lohengrin* under Christian Thielemann. 'All my plans for the summer collapsed,' he says, 'and to find some new dates in my schedule for the recording was really complicated. But we got it!' The original timing might have coincided with Beczała's Bayreuth debut, but the repertoire for the album showcases another new direction: towards *verismo*.

With this singer, though, the many strands of his repertoire – the polyglot tenor's dizzying range stretches from

I was thinking more of singers of the '20s, '30s and '40s, and of people like Björling or Gigli. They kept the very lyrical repertoire. Even Caruso sang Nemorino in his last season,' he adds, to further prove his point.

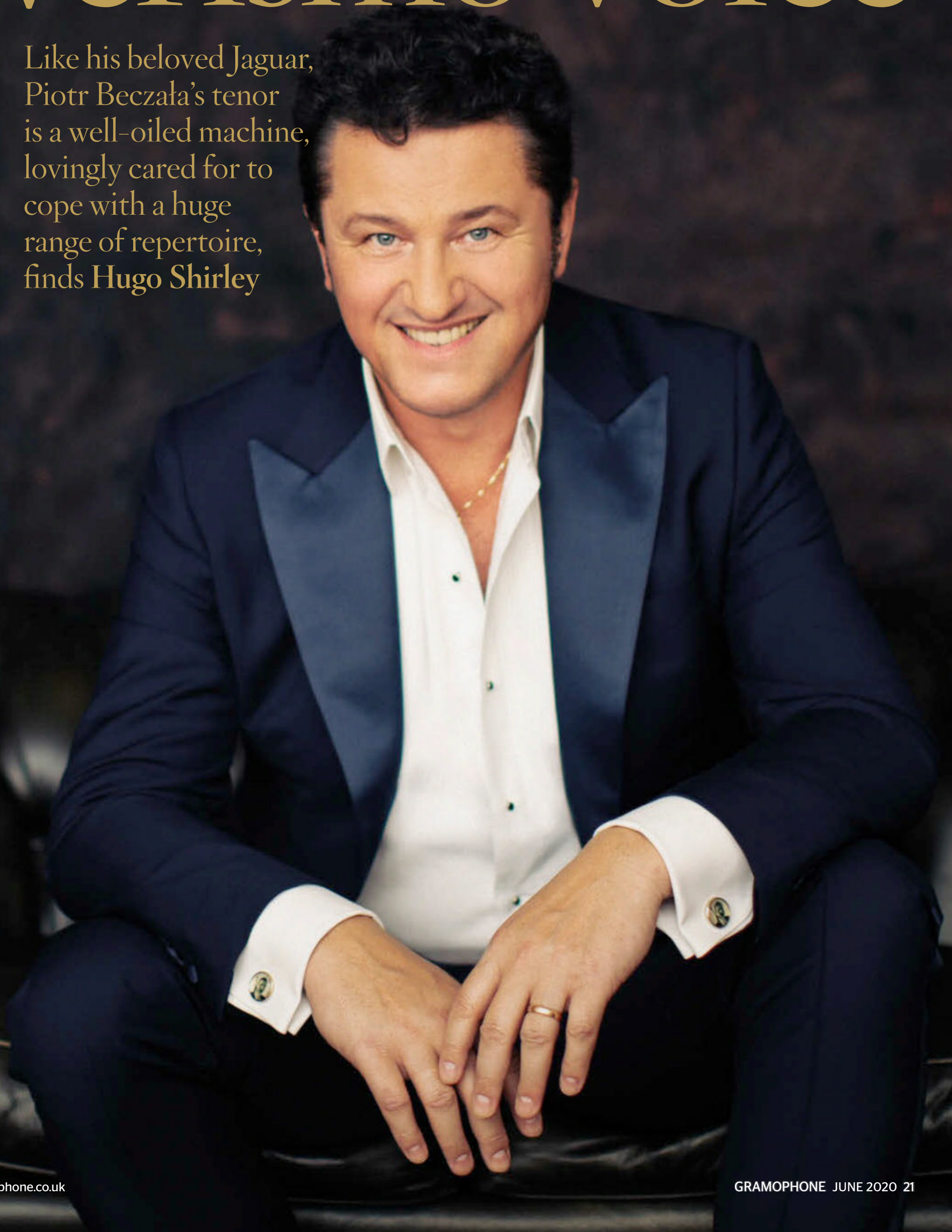
'But *verismo* is so dangerous, and it's the same thing with Wagner: it pushes you to find some stiffness in the voice. You can start to scream in *verismo* – you have to, of course – because you have to use that part of the voice, but there's still a lot of lyrical singing. If you have the technical foundation and the experience in lyric repertoire, you find it's really connected.' He treats me to a honeyed, whispered snippet of Canio's 'Vesti la giubba' to demonstrate. 'It's different phrasing, but it's still composers using *piano* and *pianissimo*. It's not screaming from beginning to end!'

Nevertheless, I wonder whether, given the generally high vocal and dramatic voltage of *verismo*, there are special challenges in recording the repertoire. 'It's such a complex problem,'



Verismo voice

Like his beloved Jaguar, Piotr Beczala's tenor is a well-oiled machine, lovingly cared for to cope with a huge range of repertoire, finds Hugo Shirley



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Beczala says. 'As my teacher told me, if you want to sing *verismo*, you have to think about the voice you produce, the sound, finding its quality maybe 10 metres away, not right in front of you. It can sound brutal or even ugly close up, but for people in the hall it has a completely different quality. And that can be a problem for recording, where the microphone is two feet in front of your nose.'

Beczala is clearly a stage animal and admits that performing just for a microphone is difficult. It's a process, he says, that 'doesn't make me happy', but he entrusts things to the engineer. 'He has to decide which position is best, then I just sing like I do in concert. We tried to find a sound that's really like the one on stage, so that those listening to the recording will have the feeling that they're sitting in the opera house, in row 15 of the Staatsoper, hearing the singer coming over the orchestra. It's *verismo*, and you need some feeling.'

Talk of Beczala's own voice – a tenor of remarkable sweetness of timbre, security and smoothness across the range – leads to discussion of his career, his long road to the top. Some of the *verismo* works on the new album bring him back to repertoire he tried out decades ago. 'It was my mistake,' he says, admitting that he was a 'short tenor' when

'I had to find my way of being satisfied singing Mozart with a voice that could sing Cavaradossi – I had to find the discipline'

he started out: a tenor without the top notes that should be his stock in trade. 'I had no chance of singing Rodolfo [*La bohème*] or *bel canto*. But in Cavaradossi's "E lucevan le stelle", the A is the highest thing; the *Luisa Miller* aria too. But that wasn't my choice; it was because I couldn't sing anything else!

'But then I changed to the lyric stuff, and I reduced my voice. It was a really complicated process to change that, to find the solid technique.' As part of the process, he set about rebuilding his voice from scratch with his teacher of 19 years Dale Fundling, after joining the ensemble of the opera house in Linz in 1992. 'I could have sung Cavaradossi 10 years ago, but I was planning it step by step. And I think it's much better to sing lyric repertoire for 20 years and then enjoy *verismo* than to sing *verismo* in the first 10 years and then just have to change profession!'

He names some eminent predecessors whose voices fell foul of being pushed, unprepared, into the repertoire, and recalls as a student working his way chronologically through the recordings of Giuseppe di Stefano: 'I was shocked.



A change of direction: Beczala as Lohengrin at Bayreuth in 2018; and as Cavaradossi (Tosca) in Vienna last year

It was amazing at the beginning, but there was a moment where he was falling in love with Callas and sang all this heavy stuff with her, beginning with *La bohème* and then Cavaradossi. And in five or six years his voice was completely ruined.'

Surely, I suggest, it takes extraordinary amounts of self-awareness and self-discipline to resist the lure of such roles, not to mention the increase in fees and adulation they are likely to bring. He agrees, adding a hearty laugh. 'Listen, I did 130 performances of Tamino, 100 performances of Belmonte. I had to find my way of being satisfied singing Mozart with a voice that was able to sing Cavaradossi.' Later in our conversation Beczala reveals he's the proud owner of a 1958 Jaguar XK150, and here he draws the first of a number of parallels between



Joyce DiDonato hosts online excerpts from Werther at her New York flat, with Beczala and Howard Watkins (piano)

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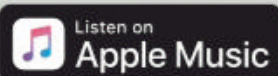


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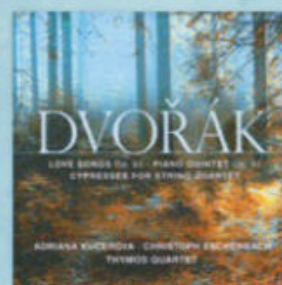
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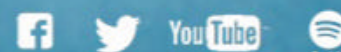
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'If the car starts making noises I have to react. It's the same with the voice': Beczala with his beloved Jaguar

singing and motoring: 'It's like driving in Formula One but having to stay on the right side of the track. Sometimes it drives you crazy, but you have to find the discipline.'

He was helped in this regard by an early encounter with the legendary Croatian-Austrian soprano Sena Jurinac. The 20-year-old Beczala received a scholarship to study with her and turned up with Cavaradossi. 'Go away and bring Mozart!' was her response. 'She was amazing, and she saved my vocal life,' he says. 'We remained in contact throughout the years, and she was so happy when I got the Linz contract.' Another important figure was the no-less-legendary Armenian-born baritone Pavel Lisitsian, who in 1987 led the first masterclass Beczala took part in, having taken a break from his studies in Katowice to go to Weimar.

'I listen to singers from the 1920s and '30s, their approach – with all the mistakes, too. This is how you manage the knowledge'

It was a couple of weeks later that Beczala first sang in Vienna – but not in the way one would imagine. 'I came here to work on construction sites to get some money. And after a whole week of heavy work I found myself in the city's first district listening to some people playing in the street. I just started singing something like 'O sole mio', and in 20 minutes I'd earned half the money that I'd earned in a day slaving away like an idiot! And from that moment I sang every day in the centre of Vienna instead.'

The main subsequent milestones in Beczala's career took him to the contract in Linz, and a 1996 recording of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* on Oehms Classics features his effortlessly aristocratic Belmonte. The same year, after a last-minute jump-in as Rinuccio, he was offered a contract in Zurich. A couple of weeks later he stepped in to sing in Bruckner's *Te Deum* with Carlo Maria Giulini in Vienna – 'It was cool,' he notes, casually. That led to a similar offer from the Vienna Staatsoper. 'I said no, because I'd already promised Zurich. They were a little disappointed!'

From Zurich he gradually built up his international career, also developing his repertoire, branching out from its sturdy Mozartian base – deliberately, and with what seems like a characteristic mixture of self-awareness, patience and focus. 'I didn't accept Tamino when the Metropolitan Opera asked,'

he explains, 'or Matteo in *Arabella*. It's not my thing. I can sing it – it's easy money; but it would be wrong to start in such a theatre with such repertoire. I was waiting for *Rigoletto*.' That opera came in 2006, and he's proud that he's returning to it again next year.


Not everything, as Beczala's Bayreuth debut showed, can be planned. But his move into Wagner and his debut as Lohengrin (preserved on video from Dresden in 2016) came about gradually as a result of one of the close relationships he has formed with his favourite conductors. He was singing a Lehár gala with Thielemann in Dresden when the conductor took him to one side to make the case for his trying Wagner: 'Look, *Lohengrin* is exactly the same as Lehár's operettas: the same language, the same tessitura, with orchestration of

more or less the same heaviness!' Five years later, the conductor had won the tenor over. 'This is a direction,' Beczala says of the role, 'but at the end of the road there isn't Tristan or anything. I'm realistic.' Nevertheless, a *Parsifal* is planned in Cleveland with Franz Welser-Möst, another favourite collaborator. And the next album, still in early planning, is likely to feature German repertoire.

Beczala's is nothing if not a career with multiple paths, though, and the beginning of the year saw him flying the flag for his homeland, starring in Vienna's high-profile new production (at the Theater an der Wien) of Poland's national opera *Halka* by Moniuszko. In addition, in February he released an album of songs by Moniuszko and Karłowicz (published on the Frederick Chopin Institute's label).

When I ask how he achieves the feat of being a specialist across so many styles and genres, Beczala's answer is straightforward. 'I take it really seriously,' he says. And as we talk about different repertoires, he reels off the names of great tenors he listens to, from a range of different traditions – and finds time, too, to give me a crash course in the fundamental differences between Polish and Czech pronunciation. But these paragons of the different national schools are there to inform rather than be imitated, he explains.

'Of course, you have to sing with *your* voice, *your* musicality. But the basic idea of how to sing each repertoire, it's already there. I'm Polish, living in Switzerland, singing in five other languages. And it could be that I'm doing it all wrong, because I can't do it instinctively. But I *think* about how to do it, I really go to the basics, and look at how they did it at that time. I listen to people from the '20s and '30s and how they approached music, with all their mistakes, too, because nobody's perfect – except for Fritz Wunderlich! This is how you manage the knowledge. It's not easy.'

And for maintaining the voice? 'It's like with my old Jag,' he answers, warming to another motoring parallel. 'I need to take care of this guy. If the car starts making noises I have to react. It's the same with the voice. There are people sitting in my audience who I trust – my wife, my agent, people who know my voice. They'll hear immediately when something is wrong, even if it's tiny.' He agrees with a laugh when I note how that can only work with voices that are well-maintained in the first place. With one careful owner, Beczala's looks set to run smoothly for a long time to come. 

For our review of *Vincere*, Beczala's first Pentatone album, see page 26

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mark Pullinger welcomes a resplendent album of verismo arias from Piotr Beczala, marking his transition from lyrical to more dramatic tenor repertoire



'Vincerò!'

Cilea Adriana Lecouvreur – L'anima ho stanca;
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Leoncavallo Pagliacci – Recitar! ... Vesti la giubba
Mascagni Cavalleria rusticana – Intanto amici ...
Viva il vino spumeggiante; Mamma, quel vino è
generoso **Puccini** Edgar – Orgia, chimera dall'occhio
vitreo. La fanciulla del West – Ch'ella mi dreda libero
e lontano. Gianni Schicchi – Avete torto ... Firenze è
come un albero fiorito. Madama Butterfly – Addio
fiorito asil. Manon Lescaut – Donna non vidi mai;
Tra voi, belle. Tosca – E lucevan le stelle; Recondita
armonia. Turandot – Nessun dorma

Piotr Beczala *ten*

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Includes texts and translations



*'Beczala has taken his time
moving into this repertoire,
and it's refreshing to hear
him tackle it with such
apparent ease'*

Readers may recall reports of an amusing incident at the Wiener Staatsoper back in 2016 when Jonas Kaufmann was 'stood up' by his Tosca, Angela Gheorghiu, allegedly to teach him a lesson after he dared to sing an encore of 'E lucevan le stelle'. A big fuss was made about the rights and wrongs of encores, but the truth is that the Viennese public usually demands one at this point. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the Staatsoper has been offering free nightly streams, trying to replicate its scheduled programme. I watched Margarethe Wallmann's classic production (1958!) of *Tosca* three times, where Piotr Beczala twice sang Cavaradossi, once making his role debut (February 2019) and another four months later, after which he was awarded the



Piotr Beczala as Cavaradossi in *Tosca* at the Vienna State Opera

coveted title of Kammersänger by Dominique Meyer. Both times, he encored 'E lucevan', rapturously received. The Viennese audience has impeccable taste.

Just listen to the luminous ring to Beczala's tenor in the open-hearted 'Recondita armonia' (minus the Sacristan) that opens his disc, which is entitled 'Vincerò!'. His voice sounds crisp and supple and there's a definite smile in there too – let's not forget that Cavaradossi is a carefree artist at this point, daydreaming about his lover in Sant'Andrea della Valle.

Beczala has taken his time moving into this repertoire – he was 52 when he sang that first Cavaradossi – and in the booklet introduction he writes that his long experience singing lyric roles has meant he is now able to approach *verismo* 'with my own style and expression'. In an age when

many singers are persuaded to take on heavier repertoire far too soon, it's refreshing to read of an artist armed with patience. And it's refreshing to hear a tenor tackle this repertoire with such apparent ease, for this is a simply wonderful disc, sensitively supported by conductor Marco Boemi and the Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana.

The obvious comparison is Jonas Kaufmann, whose 'The Age of Puccini' compilation was, rather provocatively, released by Decca just days ahead of Sony's 'Nessun dorma – The Puccini Album' (A/15). Beczala has the brighter tenor, with elasticity to his phrases, while Kaufmann's is more bronzed, more baritonal. Beczala never needs to force unduly, yet there's plenty of emotion to these readings, even if he's yet



Scrupulously clean: Beczala avoids the easy trap of emotional hysterics in portraying drama and heartfelt intensity

to sing most of these characters on stage. Only Cavaradossi, Rinuccio and Maurizio are in his repertoire at present, but that's bound to change.

Beczala's tone is scrupulously clean, whereas Kaufmann is inclined to over-emote and add sobs. Beczala's way with 'E lucevan le stelle' – which starts with the eloquent cello solo before the clarinet soliloquy – is very beautiful, in fuller voice than Kaufmann, who resorts to crooning 'Oh, dolci baci, o languide carezze', a frustrating feature of his singing in recent years. Perhaps Kaufmann's darker tone is a better fit for Dick Johnson in *La fanciulla del West* but the Pole's Pinkerton and Des Grieux need fear no comparison, including a charming 'Donna non vidi mai' that should make Manon – and audiences – swoon. Bonus points for including the tenor aria from *Edgar* and Rinuccio's paean to Florence from *Gianni Schicchi*.

Canio's pain as the clown's world falls apart in *Pagliacci* seems very real, yet without the hysterical sobs that are often appended. The Brindisi from *Cavalleria*

rusticana has bags of braggadocio (more so than the rather polite Cor de la Generalitat Valenciana) and Turiddu's farewell to Mamma Lucia is truly heartfelt. The two arias from *Andrea Chénier* are ardently sung, the phrasing – appropriately, given the character – poetic, with lots of freedom on top notes. 'Amor ti vieta', from Giordano's less-performed *Fedora*, is an intense declaration of love, phrases long breathed, even if there's just a hint of strain on the high A.

In an age where there are no longer that many studio recordings of complete operas, there's perhaps more of a need for operatic recital discs like this; an opportunity for singers to document their artistry or to set out their stall for roles to come. This has been the most satisfying one to come my way since Anna Netrebko's remarkable 'Verismo' four years ago (DG, 10/16), which included that game-changing 'In questa reggia'. Netrebko has just performed her first Turandot, albeit at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich which excises Alfano's completion and its taxing

final duet. Whether Beczala will want to tackle the complete role of Calaf is another matter, but he closes with the tenor anthem that is 'Nessun dorma', where his final B on 'vincerò' is resoundingly sung. A winner of an album, indeed. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Harriet Smith on two Mozart piano concertos in a terrific collaboration:

'There's a simplicity to Charles Richard-Hamelin's approach that is beguiling, with lithe and shapely passagework' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



Edward Seckerson hears a fine Shostakovich Eleventh Symphony:

'The long cor anglais solo at the heart of the finale might possibly be the single most profound utterance in all Shostakovich' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**

Adams

Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?^a. China Gates

Yuja Wang *pf*^a Los Angeles Philharmonic

Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel

DG © ► 483 8289 (31' • DDD)

Recorded live at Walt Disney Hall, Los Angeles, November 8, 2019



This makes for an intriguing listen straight after DG's American recording

of Thomas Adès's new Piano Concerto – not least given Adès's was coupled with his own *Totentanz* and Adams's is a *Totentanz*. But Adams's title is surely his first bit of trickery: for all its diabolical qualities, this concerto in three movements makes little attempt to flaunt any tunes. There are more in *Wozzeck*.

That's fine, because the piece is far too down-and-dirty anyway. It drops listeners straight into an urban street chase, a *moto perpetuo* powered from the midriff but underpinned by a funky slap bass whose bump-and-grind throws out all sorts of extraneous industrial sounds from the orchestra's extremities. There are features in common with the composer's previous works in the form but gone is the sheen and broad, universal world view of *Century Rolls*. This is music that doesn't get too comfortable in its own skin – or even in its own time signature.

When the chase-down ends, the piano and orchestra appear to catch their breath, turning to stare at one another under a silvery moonlight; was this a playful, maybe even sexual chase all along? They are led straight into the gallant, socially distanced dance of the second movement, which eventually prompts an audible smile from the pianist before the disruptions of the finale – all rhythmic shape-shifting and momentum-building, up to and including the surprise coda, which lurches at a slower speed towards the conclusive time-out bell.

So not such a crazily inventive concerto as Adès's nor as serious a musical commentary as some of Adams's own works, many of which it even appears to tease with derring-do (those pile-driving minor thirds in the bass dredge up the emotional undertow of *Nixon in China*). Wang and Dudamel make for ideal rival racing drivers. If Wang's *China Gates* might not have the horizon focus of some other versions, her power, rhythmic fortitude and sense of fun put a rocket under the concerto. **Andrew Mellor**

JS Bach • Goldberg • Vivaldi

'Sonar in ottava'

JS Bach Concertos - BWV1043; BWV1060

Goldberg Sonata, DürG14 Vivaldi Concertos - RV508; RV515. Sinfonia, RV125

Giuliano Carmignola *vn* Mario Brunello *vc* *picc* Accademia dell'Annunciata / Riccardo Doni *hpd* Arcana © A472 (70' • DDD)



This disc will divide listeners. There are many who, no doubt, will find the

performances exciting. Certainly, at no point is the technical facility of soloists Giuliano Carmignola and Mario Brunello under question: both whizz up and down their instruments with undeniable flair. For listeners more like myself, however, it is just too much to take: a style of music-making that carries more sense in the flesh, requiring the potential threat of snapping strings, the flaying of horsehair and the smell of sweat – stuff that magically fuses to semiquavers in the concert-hall air – for these performances to translate into virtuosity. On disc, many moments come across as sloppy. The opening *Allegro* of Vivaldi's Concerto in C, RV508, for example, is alarmingly messy and slapdash. The soloists' performances would benefit from a significant dialling-down of risk; only then, perhaps, can the virtuosity so obviously at play be cast as something enjoyable upon repeated listening. In other

moments, the playing is nowhere near together enough for this listener's taste. By no means am I after click-track alignment; some semblance of communal navigation, however, is desirable for the movements of tightly wrought counterpoint.

Sonically, some of the arrangements will take some getting used to. The effect of octave displacement and octave doubling created by the piccolo cello is particularly strange in the opening *Vivace* of Bach's Concerto in D minor, BWV1043 (known as the 'Bach Double' to most). The *Largo ma non tanto* wobbles in ego.

While I have struggled to enjoy this recording in more ways than not, I recognise that there is some undeniably fine playing on offer, particularly from the Accademia dell'Annunciata, who in many orchestral ritornellos are enviously colourful and exuberant. **Mark Seow**

Beethoven

Five Piano Concertos

Stephen Hough *pf* Finnish Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu

Hyperion © ③ CDA68291/3 (172' • DDD)



It is a tribute to the quality of Stephen Hough's musicianship that the new cycle's

most memorable performance should be that of Beethoven's Janus-like Third Piano Concerto, the one – on record at least – that has often proved the most elusive.

As experienced collectors will know, it's generally individual performances within Beethoven concerto cycles that are best remembered. This is largely because of the difficulty of finding partnerships between protagonists and their accompanists that work, and work across the board.

Revered older cycles tended to be conducted by well-schooled Kapellmeisters. I think of Solomon's partners, Herbert Menges and André Cluytens; Paul van Kempen and Ferdinand Leitner working with Wilhelm Kempff; and Leopold



Gustavo Dudamel and the LA Philharmonic in partnership with the pianist Yuja Wang give an incendiary performance of John Adams's new piano concerto

Ludwig and André Vandernoot, who conducted for Gilels (rather more agreeably than George Szell). When a front-rank conductor comes along who knows his stuff yet cares not a jot for the limelight – Klemperer buoying up the young Barenboim, Haitink working with Murray Perahia – then you really are in business. Stephen Hough's conductor, the 52-year-old Finnish-born Hannu Lintu, strikes me as being an odd choice: competent, at best decidedly so, though not without moments of wilfulness and self-regard, and not always on hand in the all-important matter of securing a narrative line when the soloist is away on other business.

To begin at the beginning, why treat the C major First Concerto's four-note opening phrase to an unmarked dabbled diminuendo on its final note (a metric stress point)? And why the unmarked *espressivo* phrasing in bars 8-12? Tiny details, but representative, in as much as they portend a backdrop that's occasionally at odds with the playing of a soloist whose fineness of touch and sharpness of

delineation recall those of such predecessors as Solomon and Gilels.

True, there are some added frills and furbelows, small improvisations, none of them marked in the new Bärenreiter edition used by Hough, which may not wear well on record. Which is why the unassuaged boldness of the performance of the Third Concerto is so impressive. Things hang together a touch less well in the Fourth Concerto and barely at all in an unevenly directed account of the Fifth, which emerges more as a series of unbound leaves than a well-stitched volume.

If the sound quality is excellent, the supervision of below-the-radar detail is occasionally less so. In the slow movement of the Fourth Concerto we have stentorian strings set against a fine-drawn piano sound whose etiolation results in a silence in bar 9 that Beethoven didn't write. (His quaver rest comes in the variant at bar 22). Mind you, it's the very refinement of Hough's playing that makes for such close listening.

All but one of the cadenzas are Beethoven's own. Hough has written

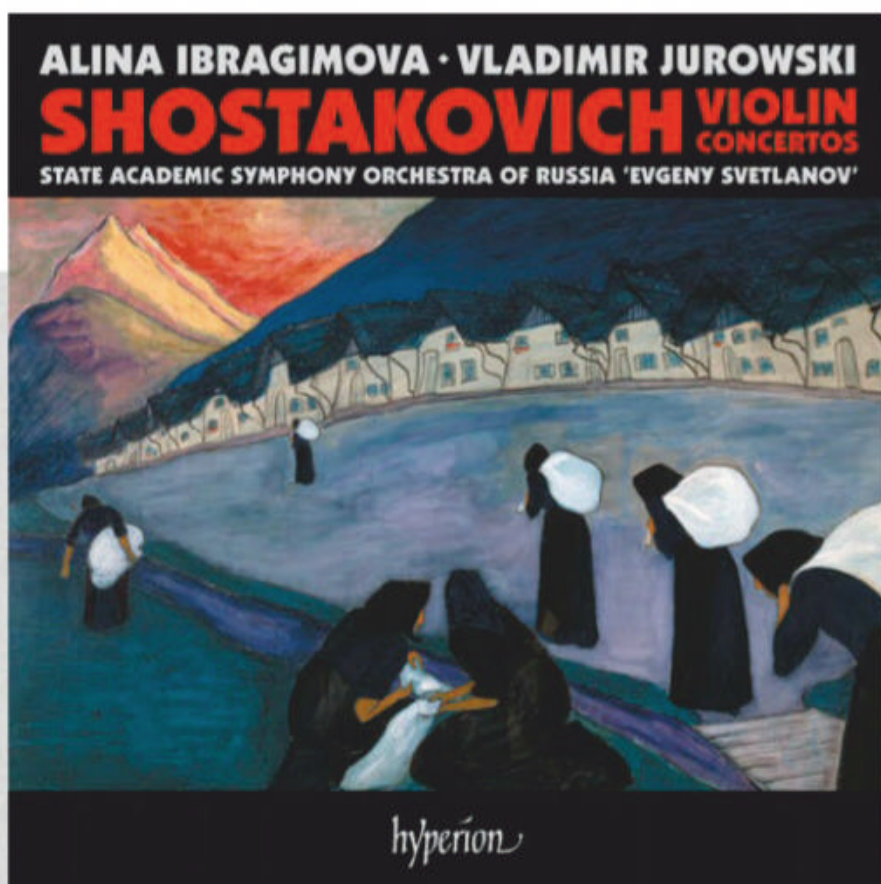
elsewhere how he dislikes the cadenza Beethoven later added for the admittedly rather flimsy first movement of the early B flat Second Concerto. One takes his point. Equally, you might argue that the 1809 cadenza prepares us for the greater things that are to come in the concerto's final two movements, where, as Neville Cardus once put it, we have immortal music unrelated to the mortal age at which it was composed.

The new Bärenreiter edition brings no real surprises, except on the final chord of the slow movement of the Third Concerto, where the piano nails down the music's famously foreign key with its own *fortissimo* E. Still, the violins' high G sharp still sounds; and with the segue pretty well in place, Beethoven's hilariously subversive series of puns on G sharp, G and A flat shines through as well as on any recording I know. **Richard Osborne**

Selected comparisons:

Barenboim, New Philh Orch, Klemperer
(4/69^R) (WARN) 2564 60760-1

Perahia, Concertgebouw Orch, Haitink
(1/89^R) (SONY) 88697 10290-2



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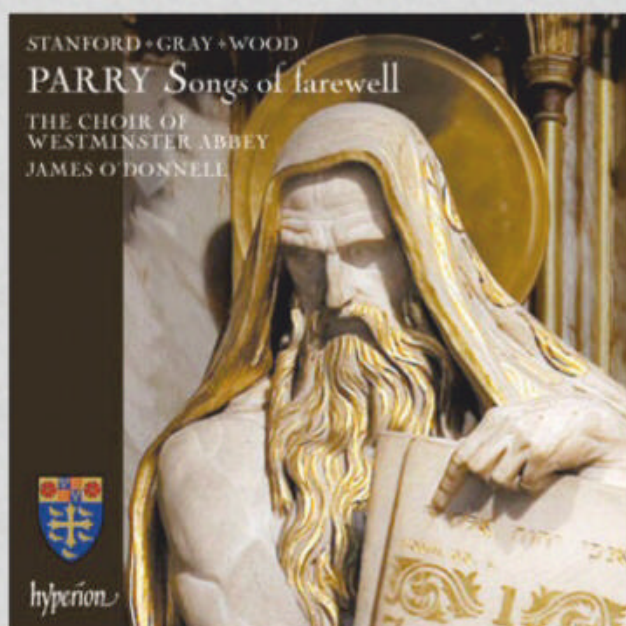
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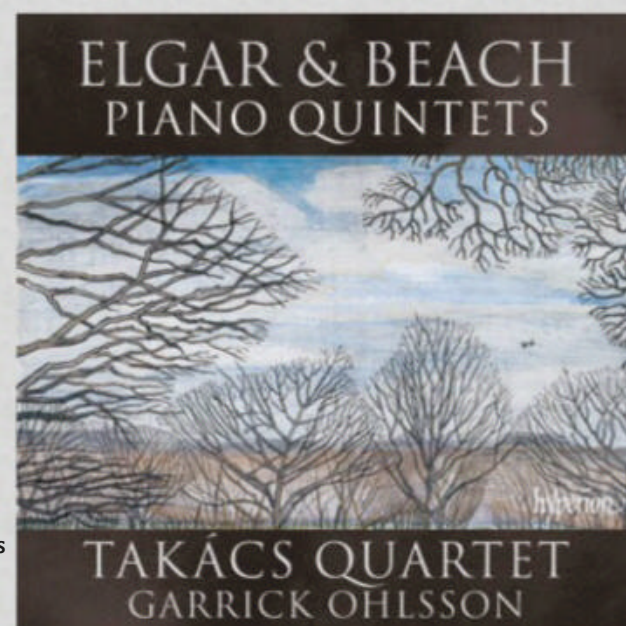
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BBC PHILHARMONIC
MARTYN BRABBINS conductor



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Beethoven · Grieg · Mozart

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 2, Op 19^a

Grieg Holberg Suite, Op 40^b

Mozart Divertimento, K136 – Allegro^b

^a**Martha Argerich** *pf*

Mito Chamber Orchestra / Seiji Ozawa

Decca (F) 485 0592 (56' • DDD)

Recorded live at Tower Mito, Mito City, Ibaraki, Japan, ^bMay 9 & 10, 2017; ^aMay 28, 2019



Martha Argerich returns for the umpteenth time to Beethoven's Second

Piano Concerto, a work she has championed throughout her career while others have often favoured the larger, more heaven-storming works. It may have been recorded a matter of days before her 78th birthday but nevertheless bubbles over with that ever-youthful sense of improvisation, of molten creativity taking place absolutely in the moment that always characterises this unique pianist's performances. Seiji Ozawa's orchestra brings a chamber edge to the sound but the focus – perhaps inevitably – favours the piano over the last degree of orchestral detail.

In terms of large-scale interpretation, this doesn't depart notably from other recordings in the pianist's catalogue, perhaps most notably the one she made with Abbado and the Mahler CO 20 years ago and which became *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month in 2005. 'Enthralling spontaneity' was Bryce Morrison's verdict then and nothing has changed – except the way the light newly, revealingly catches the contour of a phrase or a hidden inner voice suddenly catches Argerich's ear. She keeps Ozawa and his players on their toes and, to their credit, they stick with her every step of the way. The Japanese audience respond at the end with ringing cheers and wild applause.

The joy of music-making beams from Ozawa's face in the booklet pictures but only intermittently in a relaxed *Holberg* Suite, and in one of Mozart's Salzburg divertimentos stripped not only of fizz but also, for some reason (other than disc space), of its slow movement and finale.

David Threasher

Beethoven – selected comparison:

Argerich, Mahler CO, Abbado (1/05) (DG) 477 5026GH

Beethoven

Triple Concerto, Op 56^a. Symphony No 7, Op 92^b

^a**Anne-Sophie Mutter** *vn* ^a**Yo-Yo Ma** *vc*

West-Eastern Divan Orchestra /

Daniel Barenboim *apf*

DG (F) 483 8242GH (74' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^bCentro Cultural Kirchner, Buenos Aires, July 2019; ^aPhilharmonie, Berlin, October 2019



Here's a performance of Beethoven's Triple Concerto that conveys a palpable sense of occasion – and with good reason, as it was recorded in a concert celebrating the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra's 20th birthday. Although Anne-Sophie Mutter and Yo-Yo Ma's partnership is stronger on dramatic juxtaposition than tonal blend, both really dig into their parts, sometimes even throw caution to the wind. Listen starting at 6'32" in the first movement, for example, where both trade refinement for ferocity. Barenboim (conducting from the piano) facilitates real flexibility in regards to tempo, resulting in a convincing sense of improvisatory abandon, and the orchestra match their fervour. The central *Largo* is keenly expressive; and while the final *Rondo alla polacca* feels a bit heavy – Barenboim has the orchestra stomping rather than dancing through the rhythms – it still abounds with character. Try, say, the passage at 4'54", where the three soloists play with tremendous swagger, although some may feel it's a bit over the top, particularly when heard alongside Fricisay's classic account, where Anda, Schneiderhan and Fournier strut with such nobility.

I found the Seventh Symphony, recorded in Buenos Aires a few months earlier, considerably less satisfying. Interpretatively, it's quite similar to the muscle-bound recording in Barenboim's Staatskapelle Berlin cycle (Warner, 4/00). Yet again, there's lyrical intensity and unusual weight in the first movement's *Vivace* as well as the strongly measured *Allegretto*, but this time the third movement feels unexpectedly cautious and the finale lacks articulacy – note the smudged opening bars, for instance.

DG has placed the microphones very close to the soloists in the concerto – one can almost hear the spray of rosin – at the cost of orchestral detail. In the symphony, there's a more realistic concert-hall perspective. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Bernstein

Symphonies – No 1, 'Jeremiah'^a;

No 2, 'The Age of Anxiety'^b

^a**Anna Larsson** *mez* ^b**Roland Pöntinen** *pf* **Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra / Christian Lindberg**
BIS (F) (S) BIS2298 (60' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Whenever I listen to the First Symphony I am mindful of how dramatically

Bernstein started as he meant to go on – a symphony, a ballet (*Fancy Free*) and a Broadway musical (*On the Town*) all feverishly penned in the same year, 1944, like a declaration not so much of independence but of his all-embracing musical personality.

Much as I love the *Jeremiah* Symphony, it's the Second, *The Age of Anxiety*, that resonates in a deeper place for me. It is the kind of dark night of the soul scenario (after Bernstein's blessed Auden) that was always going to appeal to the young composer's philosophical, not to say theatrical nature. Identification with the urban landscape was one aspect of its appeal. The solitude, creative and otherwise; the sense of change and renewal, spiritual and actual. Antonio Pappano set the bar dramatically high with his Rome orchestra and the virtuoso young keyboard whizz Beatrice Rana in the composer's centenary year but Christian Lindberg and his unlikely Arctic Philharmonic really 'get' the quietudes in the piece: from the Edward Hopperesque duo of lonely clarinets onwards it is a reading that really probes the inky atmosphere of a nocturnal adventure.

The evolutionary nature of the variation form, the constant sense of new beginnings may be subliminal but it is felt – and there is a motoric imperative about the performance, from both the brilliant Arctic orchestra and Roland Pöntinen's fiercely percussive playing. He doesn't convey Rana's throwaway cool in the dazzling 'The Masque' section but he is brilliant for sure (as is the jewelled percussion), not least in the jazzy cascades of notes that Bernstein drizzles over the latter part of this highly original episode. The moment of disembodiment when a second piano distances the soloist from himself, as it were, is spot-on, too. But it is the poetry of Pöntinen's playing, the inwardness, that stays with one. Lindberg gave us an impressive *On the Waterfront* on this label quite recently with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (6/18), so naturally he makes a fist of the closing pages (a close relative of that movie score), the long haul to the far horizon and hopeful new beginnings.

Lindberg's reading of *Jeremiah* gives notice of his keen sense of colour in the contrast between the opening horn oration and the gleaming high woodwinds'

response to it. And it all sounds very handsome, very widescreen, thanks to the usual excellence from the BIS production team. I'm not entirely sure about the markedly deliberate tempo for the middle-movement scherzo 'Profanation'. It serves the lyric counterpoint at the midpoint of the movement well enough but for me it just takes the edge off the excitement, despite the blaze of Babylonian trumpets. Anna Larsson brings her darkest maternal mezzo to bear on the closing movement. It's the colour of 'Lamentation' certainly, despite unintelligible words, and she and Lindberg pull out the requisite emotional charge at the climax.

Much to savour, then. But I'd still go for Pappano in both pieces, though there, of course, you get the hat-trick of symphonies on two discs. **Edward Seckerson**

Selected comparisons:

S Cecilia Orch, Pappano (9/18) (WARN) 9029 56615-8

Bizet • Gounod

Bizet Carmen Suite No 1 (arr Guiraud)^a.

Symphony^a Gounod Petite Symphonie^b

^bmembers of the ^aScottish Chamber

Orchestra / François Leleux ^bob

Linn © CKD624 (64' • DDD)



François Leleux's first album with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra flanks

Gounod's *Petite Symphonie* for nine wind instruments with Bizet's *Symphony in C* and the first of the *Carmen* suites posthumously arranged by Ernest Guiraud, who also provided the opera with its now discredited recitatives. A regular guest with the SCO, the oboist turned conductor has clearly established a strong relationship with the orchestra over the years: we hear him in both roles here, in performances that have bags of charm and sound as authentically French as one could wish.

The *Symphony in C* sounds marvellously fresh and new-minted here. Leleux carefully calibrates the balance between energy and grace, so that everything seems perfectly proportioned and nothing is rushed or heavy-footed. Bizet's debts to his classical models – Haydn, early Beethoven – are discreetly emphasised without losing sight of his originality or individuality. The outer movements have tremendous verve. There's plenty of wit and warmth in the Scherzo – the Trio is particularly delightful – and the *Adagio* is all wistful refinement, its oboe solo exquisitely played. The SCO strings are ravishing at this point, too, and later do

wonderful things with the gossamer textures of the finale.

I admit to being less fond than some, however, of Guiraud's *Carmen* rehash, with its lurching juxtaposition between the Fate theme and the Act 4 Aragonaise at the start, and the vocal line of the Séguedille transcribed for cor anglais and trumpet, which robs it of some of its sensuousness. But you can't fault the performance, which has the same qualities of proportion and balance as the *Symphony*, with beautifully poised flute and clarinet solos in the Act 2 Intermezzo and real brio in the closing Toreador's March. Leleux plays first oboe in the Gounod, meanwhile, where one notes his familiar beauty of tone and sensitivity of phrasing. He's very much part of an ensemble of equals, though: there's a real sense of give and take among the instrumentalists here, in a performance of fastidious elegance and, once again, great refinement. The recording itself captures some occasional woodwind key-clatter but is otherwise scrupulously engineered. A hugely enjoyable disc.

Tim Ashley

Brahms

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 83^a. Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op 24

Lars Vogt *pf*^a**Royal Northern Sinfonia**

Online © ODE1346-2 (74' • DDD)



Hot on the heels of their impressive Brahms D minor Concerto (1/20), the

Royal Northern Sinfonia with Lars Vogt as soloist and conductor have now released the B flat Concerto, paired with Vogt's performance of the *Handel Variations*. The First Concerto was recorded in early winter 2018, while the Second was set down in mid-February 2019. Together they stand as a monument to a remarkable collaboration between the Sinfonia and Vogt, who is at the end of his five-year tenure as their music director. In comparison with the D minor Concerto, the B flat, with its wider expressive range and not inconsiderable ensemble challenges, seems an even greater feat, beautifully achieved.

Vogt's approach is robust, shapely and highly rhythmical. He mitigates Brahms's habitual textural thickness by refusing to pedal through staccato passages. Together with the orchestra, a marvellous plasticity of line is maintained throughout. This pliant rubato is the bedrock of their realisation of the music's passionate ardour and vast sense of space.

In a Scherzo where fury threatens violence, the placating pathos of the upper strings (0'20") pierces the heart. After the strings and horns have pulled back the momentum to the Trio's cooler climes, the piano's lyrical line (5'30") speaks with a restrained nobility, disarming in its eloquence. In the *Andante*, Vogt exchanges primacy for partnership, allowing Steffan Morris's exquisite cello solo the lead. Interestingly, as this exchange unfolds, it becomes clear that its drama forms the crux of the entire concerto, assuaging, if not resolving, the towering conflicts of the first two movements. The path is opened to the rambling pleasures and open air of the Hungarian Rondo finale.

Icing for this already substantial cake is provided by Vogt's *Handel Variations*, which share with the concerto a home key. As lithe, evocative and compelling as the 25 variations are, the fugue comes as little short of a revelation. Vogt begins this *grande machine* with the utmost expressivity, lovingly shaping each line and indulging every opportunity for playfulness. By the time the octave bells begin to peal (3'59"), it is as though the entire populace has been caught up in a paroxysm of celebration. What a pleasure to encounter Brahms, so often interpreted as relentlessly earnest, here captured with his eyes brimming with joy. **Patrick Rucker**

Czerny

Concertino, Op 210/213 (Op 197). Grand

Concerto No 2. Rondino sur un thème favori de l'opéra 'Le Maçon' d'Auber, Op 127

Rosemary Tuck *pf*

English Chamber Orchestra / Richard Bonyngne

Naxos © 8 573998 (82' • DDD)



Carl Czerny gave the Viennese premiere of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto in 1812

and a mere 12 days later started work on his second *Grand Concerto*. No surprise, then, that it shares its key – E flat – with the Beethoven, nor that its copious outpouring of themes often brings to mind the heroic side of Beethoven's character: there are more than hints of the *Emperor*, *Eroica* and *Leonore* No 3 here and there. There are also distinct premonitions of Chopin at his most *bel canto*; of Liszt in a determination to squeeze in as many notes as possible and then add some more; and, bound together as it is by a prominent horn part, valiantly taken by Hugh Seenan, of Brahms at his most lyrical.



Nicola Benedetti follows Elgar's emotional demands every inch of the way in her moving performance of his Violin Concerto

Czerny had no problem coming up with melodies but he lacked Beethoven's gift for the twist that lodges them so indelibly in the mind. What remains after the work has finished is a sense of a profoundly gifted composer – certainly an expert orchestrator – but without the stubborn quality control that saw Beethoven work away at a theme for weeks, months or years before he was happy to deploy it in a major work. The opus numbers involved here show that these are all early works (yes, really!) and one senses the youthful urge to say in one go all that has to be said. But then, that's why concert halls and CD racks overflow with Beethoven rather than Czerny.

The numerical confusion surrounding the much briefer Concertino stems from its being published in two parts – a single-movement Concertino, Op 210, and an *Andante and Rondo*, Op 213; its manuscript was designated Op 197. The Rondino is one among many fantasias on operatic pops of the day. Rosemary Tuck makes a fine case for all this interesting, worthy music, if not quite illuminating it with the evangelic zeal or pianistic finish that Howard Shelley brings to his recordings of similarly

little-known works in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series.

David Thresher

Elgar

Violin Concerto, Op 61^a. Chanson de nuit, Op 15 No 1^b. Salut d'amour, Op 12^b. Sospiri, Op 70^b
Nicola Benedetti *vn* ^b**Petr Limonov** *pf* ^a**London Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Vladimir Jurowski**
 Decca © 485 0949 (59' • DDD)



A sense of dignified reserve distinguishes Vladimir Jurowski's handling of the Concerto's opening *tutti*, with plenty of telling woodwind detail and a radiant orchestral statement of the lovely second subject. Thoughtful is how I'd describe Jurowski's conducting, toughening for the darkened phrase (2'45") that precedes Nicola Benedetti's rhapsodic opening monologue. The emergent effect is deeply conversational, Benedetti's handling of the second idea in its solo guise, limpid and intimate. From around 8'50" she brings a sense of Brahmsian momentum to Elgar's

gutsy chordal writing, though the *tutti* that follows might have benefited from more in the way of drive and momentum, even defiance (such a prominent aspect of the work's nature). Still, by now Benedetti is, in terms of the bow, singing her heart out, though I do sometimes sense that Jurowski is holding her in check. I'd have liked a more dialogic approach, though taken on its own terms the LPO play with plenty of feeling.

Perhaps the most moving aspect of this performance – also testimony to Benedetti's knack of getting under the skin the piece – is the finale's haunting accompanied cadenza, where above quietly strumming strings she indulges what seems like a stream of consciousness, wandering hither and thither to the likes of Brahms, Schumann and Paganini, before referencing one or other of the concerto's salient themes as a reminder of where we really are. Elgar here seems to be indulging a sort of confessional, baring his musical soul, and Benedetti follows him every inch of the way. The slow movement is also very lovely, warm yet never overstated, whereas *Sospiri*, under the circumstances of writing this review (the horror and sadness of

coronavirus), serves as a deeply moving memorial, such is the power of music to mark the moment. Affectionate playing too in *Salut d'amour* and, especially, *Chanson de nuit*, taken quite swiftly with a full, ripe tone, and nicely accompanied by Petr Liminov: Fauré springs to mind, maybe in *Shylock* mode. But the Concerto is the thing, Benedetti shining a beam on its reigning quality: sincerity. Nobility too; and although other digital versions (Ehnes, Hahn, Znaider, Kennedy etc) have also moved me, none that I can recall has made me more keenly aware of just what a great work this is, up there with the concertos of Brahms, Schumann and Tchaikovsky, that's for sure. **Rob Cowan**

Farrenc

Symphony No 1, Op 32. *Grandes variations sur un thème du comte Gallenberg*^a.

Overtures – No 1, Op 23; No 2, Op 24

^aJean Muller *pf* Solistes Européens,

Luxembourg / Christoph König

Naxos © 8 574094 (58' • DDD)



Though Louise Farrenc's chamber music, much of it long neglected, has

gradually been restored to the repertoire in recent years, we have yet, perhaps, to appreciate her achievement as an orchestral composer, so this album from Christoph König and the Solistes Européens, a companion to their previous recording of Farrenc's Second and Third Symphonies (2018), goes some way towards redressing the balance.

Her First Symphony, dating from 1842 and a striking amalgam of Romanticism and Classicism, is indebted in some ways to the German symphonic tradition, yet at the same time reveals an individual voice of considerable originality. There are glances in the direction of Beethoven in the first movement, and Schumann in the finale. In place of the expected scherzo, however, Farrenc offers a Minuet, though its slightly abrasive tone takes us into territory far removed from retro 18th-century pastiche. The taut structure offsets an often remarkable volatility of mood until the scampering finale sweeps the tensions away, and throughout, you're struck both by the inventiveness of Farrenc's thematic and melodic writing and by the surety of her orchestration.

The overtures that accompany it, meanwhile, date from 1834 and sound very much like the opening movements of symphonic works that remained

incomplete. In both you notice the same volatility and tautness. The swirling energy of the Second was much admired by Berlioz in its day, though the anxious, reined-in quality of the First, in E minor, creates the greater impact. The disc is rounded off with the concertante *Grandes variations* on a theme by Count Robert von Gallenberg, a popular Austrian ballet composer of the time, which are perhaps less successful. Farrenc was a well-known piano virtuoso in her lifetime and the demands placed on the soloist are considerable. But the theme itself is ornate and florid, giving the pianist too little room for expressive manoeuvre as the variations progress.

You sense König's commitment to this repertoire throughout, in interpretations that delve into the dramas of this music with a combination of restless energy and refinement. Farrenc's sometimes melancholy woodwind-writing, often for pairs of instruments in close counterpoint, is beautifully served by the Luxembourg players, while the weighty dexterity of the strings ensures that the Symphony's finale and the E flat Overture are exhilaratingly done. Jean Muller is the muscular soloist in the *Grandes variations*, which gets a performance here of some considerable panache that doesn't quite dispel the work's moments of stolidity. The recording itself is admirably spacious and carefully balanced. **Tim Ashley**

Goehr • C Matthews • Meredith

Goehr after 'The Waking'^a C Matthews

Postludes^b Meredith *Tripotage Miniatures*^c

^bNicholas Daniel *ob* ^cAurora Orchestra; ^bBritten

Sinfonia; ^aNash Ensemble / Martyn Brabbins

NMC © NMCD239 (52' • DDD)

Recorded live at Wigmore Hall, London,

^cSeptember 24, 2016; ^aSeptember 20, 2017;

^bFebruary 6, 2019



The past decade has seen contemporary music accorded much greater presence on

Wigmore Hall programmes, the three pieces featured here between them testifying to the notable roster of composers and performers who have been heard at this august venue over recent seasons.

Anna Meredith's *Tripotage Miniatures* (2016) makes diverting and often engaging play with its heterogeneous ensemble – witness the teasingly insubstantial dialogue of '40 Watt', often fraught interplay of harmonic and melodic elements in

'Buzzard', then increasingly animated conversation provoked by the perpetual motion of 'Majolica': object lessons in less is more. Alexander Goehr's *after 'The Waking'* (2017) is more to do with organic cohesion and unity, lines from a setting of Theodore Roethke being the starting point for five movements scored for this decidedly off-kilter quintet, whose members unfold a dense yet thoughtful and often eloquent polyphony that references archetypes long absorbed from Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Finally to Colin Matthews's *Postludes* (2018) – a sequence completed in the aftermath of the death of Oliver Knussen, which doubtless occasioned the expression of music that travels from a febrile Prelude, through a wanly Elegiac Intermezzo and wistful Barcarolle, to an Epilogue that brings a measure of closure while understandably little sense of catharsis.

Nicholas Daniel gives his all in this latter work and there can be no doubting the commitment or insight of each group, heard to advantage in the fabled Wigmore acoustic. A pity another work of comparable length was not included, but maybe a second NMC disc is in the offing? **Richard Whitehouse**

MacMillan

Symphony No 5, 'Le grand Inconnu'.

The Sun Danced^a

^aMary Bevan *sop* The Sixteen; Genesis Sixteen;

Britten *Sinfonia* / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16179 (79' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

October 14, 2019



To Mahler's well-known remark that the symphony must be like the world, containing

everything, James MacMillan appears to be finding more things to include in his symphonies by often looking beyond it.

His Third pushed sound against the limits of silence, while the powerful Fourth shaped time by pitting movement against stasis. The Fifth is on an even more ambitious scale, combining large choral and orchestral forces to explore that great unknown, the Holy Spirit (hence its subtitle, *Le grand Inconnu*). Texts are drawn mainly from religious sources such as St John of the Cross, Acts and Genesis, in addition to key words and expressions from several languages, including Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

MacMillan has emphasised that the Fifth Symphony is not a liturgical work



Hidden depths: James MacMillan's Fifth Symphony receives an absorbing premiere at the Barbican from Britten Sinfonia and The Sixteen under Harry Christophers

and one can certainly relate to it on several levels. The first of its three movements announces itself with scarcely a whisper, sounds gathering around the edges of silence like tiny particles of dust, before finally taking on a more physical shape with the two-syllable utterance 'Ruah', the Hebrew word for breath. After a series of loud and dramatic collisions, the music settles into the more familiar surroundings of MacMillan's mature choral style, with melismatic vocal lines overlapping and echoing one another. Taking its cue from the Greek word for water, 'Zao', the second opens with a series of shimmering lines traced in harp, piano and percussion before acquiring a scherzo-like character when a series of solo voices is introduced, and ending with a dazzling display of Tallis-like polyphonic writing. The third draws together elements from the previous two, luxuriating in the warm afterglow of a C major chord to the words 'O living flame of love' before exploding into life through pounding metal percussion, full-throated brass and fanfare-like perorations. It's a symphony that manages to create an immediate

impression while also revealing hidden depths through repeated listening. The relationship between chorus and orchestra seems even more fully integrated and finely tuned here than in the *Stabat mater* (5/17), with excellent contributions from The Sixteen, Britten Sinfonia and Genesis Sixteen alike, directed by Harry Christophers.

The other work on the disc, *The Sun Danced*, for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra, charts the so-called Miracle of the Sun event that took place in Fátima, Portugal, during the summer of 1917. Occurring against the backdrop of the First World War, MacMillan's setting is held together by a melodic line that appears to draw on the closing four-note figure of Bach's chorale 'Es ist genug'. More episodic in design and programmatic in scope, it certainly benefits from an impressive performance by the soprano Mary Bevan. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Mahler

Symphony No 6

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra / Tomáš Netopil
Oehms ® (two discs for the price of one) OC1716
(85' • DDD)



Here's a Mahler Sixth that comes with its own historical context. Unlikely as it may

now seem, Essen was where Mahler first performed the harrowing Sixth in 1906 and the Essener Philharmoniker is the orchestra that can lay claim to having brought it into the world. It was at the dress rehearsal for that performance that Strauss (who had opened the orchestra's new hall in 1904 with his *Symphonia domestica*) witnessed the effect that the piece had on its composer and somewhat tactlessly (by all accounts) made light of his (Mahler's) distress. I personally think that it was almost certainly at this time that Mahler made the decision (reluctantly) to reverse the middle movements for subsequent performances and in doing so soften the incendiary juxtaposition of first movement and Scherzo. In short, he lost his nerve.

The Essen Philharmonic's current principal conductor Tomáš Netopil rightly adopts the original order for this

recording (and we know for sure now that Mahler did revert to the original order before his death) but sad to say that in every other respect the weight of history has not been carried forwards with this performance. One so often knows where a reading of this piece is going from the sound and spirit of the opening pages. Netopil sets off on a route-march to the abyss that is almost jaunty in its bright and open manner. It is possessed of quite the wrong kind of spring in its step, no weight or 'drag' to the rhythm, note values collectively clipped. It lacks ballast, fire, punch. Paradoxically the arrival of 'Alma's Theme' conveys no uplift at all. It should sweep us off our feet, its intensity lifted in the reprise with pungent clarinets and descanting horns – both decidedly muted here. Indeed, the 'recessed' sound picture does little for the immediacy and impact of the piece – everything feels like it's set back and blended. Brass and pugnacious woodwinds keep their distance.

Netopil and his players display a modicum of poetry in the central departure of this first movement but still it feels wishy-washy and without Mahlerian fibre. And there is an extended passage just prior to the coda where the reading gets so lachrymose as to lose all impetus.

Again, the soft-edged 'blend' is not what Mahler ordered for his trenchant, excoriating Scherzo. This quite shocking juxtaposition, the plunge again into minor-key remorselessness, needs to be shocking. I like Netopil's way with the shy and awkward rubatos of the Trios (I always recall Neville Cardus's description of 'a Ländler danced by polar bears') but again I crave 'immediacy' for Mahler's spooky, scarifying 'special effects'. Nothing should be at a safe distance.

The *Andante* (in its rightful place) now tenders its wondrous remoteness – fraught with heartache – but as we cross the threshold of the monstrous finale you need a Bernstein or a Tennstedt to signal just how unforgiving, just how much of an ordeal, the next 30 minutes are going to be. That isn't the case here. Netopil and the Essen Philharmonic are not going to knock anybody's socks off. The one thing that they and the engineers get absolutely right are the hammer blows. Just the sound – the crack of doom – that Mahler had in his mind's ear.

But where is the first trumpet – indeed, where are the other five? They should sear through the texture each time the hammer comes down while trombones and tubas weigh in. Given the size and dynamic potential of what is assembled there, the

back of the orchestra barely gets a look in. And overall that all-enveloping blackness is nowhere – even the threnody of grief-laden trombones in the coda sounds almost casual, oddly prosaic.

Sorry – history trumps performance here. Reach for your Bernstein or Tennstedt. **Edward Seckerson**

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 17, K453; No 23, K488

Ben Kim *pf* **Concertgebouw Chamber**

Orchestra / Michael Waterman *vn*

Challenge Classics © CC72816 (56' • DDD)



Ben Kim (*b*1983, Portland, Oregon) studied with Leon Fleisher and has

been a protégé of Martha Argerich. His recording activity includes a disc of Chopin Preludes that has nevertheless so far not achieved conspicuous worldwide circulation. That is a pity, for his debut with Challenge Classics reveals a sensitive touch and an awareness of the dimensions of two of Mozart's most lyrical concertos. On their own terms, these performances give pleasure in their delivery of Mozart's indelible melodic writing, the complementary challenges of virtuosity and *cantabile* met without issue.

What seems to be missing is the personal approach. In the hands of, say, Curzon, Brendel, Pollini, Perahia, Imogen Cooper or Maria João Pires, the slow movement of the A major Concerto, K488, becomes more than a piano aria in F sharp minor and takes on an impassioned, almost spiritual depth that appears to be beyond Kim's scope; the finale is playful but without the spirited, impish quality that is evidently there to be mined from its DNA. The G major Concerto, K453, is perhaps more emotionally ambivalent but Kim's response barely approaches the range of nuance (or of dynamic) realised by those older pianists.

That's not to say that rewards are not to be found here. If you want to be caressed or even soothed by these works, this disc is ideal. If, however, you expect Mozart's mature creativity at its blazing zenith to challenge, cajole and provoke, you would be advised to look elsewhere.

David Threasher

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 22, K482; No 24, K491

Charles Richard-Hamelin *pf*

Les Violons du Roy / Jonathan Cohen

Analekta © AN2 9147 (65' • DDD)



In these unworldly times of enforced social lockdown it's interesting what gives

emotional succour. I'd been revelling in the discovery of Mozart's K488 with Radu Lupu live in Vienna in 1991 with a beaming Sándor Végh on YouTube when this disc arrived. For his first disc of Mozart, Charles Richard-Hamelin is joined by his fellow Quebeckers Les Violons du Roy, under their inspirational music director Jonathan Cohen.

There's a simplicity to Richard-Hamelin's approach that is beguiling (and far from simple to achieve): this is apparent from his very first entry in K482, following a *tutti* full of colour and imagination. The soloist's passagework is lithe and shapely, eschewing the cool virtuosity of some. And, as with all the best readings of these concertos, there's a lively sense of dialogue between soloist and individual instruments. Though Les Violons are not a period-instrument band, they have thoroughly absorbed the movement's ethos and use modern string instruments with period bows. This is vividly illustrated in the variation-form *Andante* of K482, where vibrato is reduced to a minimum and Cohen sets up a slow pace for the theme itself that creates an almost sacred aura; Mackerras for Brendel flows at a faster tempo but both are very effective and there are many wonderful instances of piano duetting with wind, not least a wonderfully creamy-toned bassoon on this new set. The fleeting turn to the major (8'24") is duly heart-rending too. The sense of emotional release in the genial finale also comes across very winningly and the *Andante cantabile* section is movingly done, with the clarinets, bassoon and horns creating a chorale-like texture. The cadenzas in the outer movements of the concerto are Richard-Hamelin's own and they fit well – basically Mozartian in style but with the occasional foray into more Beethovenian harmonies. Prior to listening to this new disc I'd been reacquainting myself with Edwin Fischer's readings – which sound remarkably fresh and new even though they were made in the 1930s; in spirit they're not so far from Richard-Hamelin and his cohorts.

Jonathan Cohen conjures a sense of dark unease in the opening of K491, with the brass and timpani given due prominence, to which the soloist responds with restraint and simplicity of phrasing. Others are more focused on colour,

particularly Anderszewski and Uchida in her newer recording with the Cleveland Orchestra, while Edwin Fischer brings a compelling intensity that drives the music forwards. But Richard-Hamelin holds his own by creating a sense of intense dialogue with his fellow instrumentalists. His cadenza offers a guided tour of the music's main motifs; and when the orchestra returns there's a blazing power to the wind- and brass-playing.

That intimacy and sense of detail is just as apparent in the remaining two movements, for instance in the way the strings emulate the piano's opening phrases in the *Larghetto*. The finale's variations are brought alive in the manner of a set of character pieces, from the lean string theme itself, to the piano's fizzing response in Var 1, the wind-band sonorities conjured in Var 4 or the *opera buffa*-ish élan of Var 6. As the darkness returns for the concerto's close, it sets the seal on a very fine new recording. **Harriet Smith**

Concerto No 22 – selected comparisons:

E Fischer, orch, Barbirolli (2/36^R, 7/98) (APR) APR5523

Brendel, SCO, Mackerras (6/01) (PHIL) ➔ 468 367-2PH

Concerto No 24 – selected comparisons:

E Fischer, LPO, Collingwood

(1/38^R, 7/10) (APR) APR7303

Anderszewski, Sinf Varsovia

(4/02) (VIRG/ERAT) 545504-2

Uchida, Cleveland Orch (12/09) (DECC) 478 1524DH

Poulenc

Piano Concerto^a. Concert champêtre^a. Oboe

Sonata^b. Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon^c

Mark Bebbington *pf*^{bc} **John Roberts** *ob*

^c**Jonathan Davies** *bn* ^a**Royal Philharmonic**

Orchestra / Jan Latham-Koenig

Resonus © RES10256 (73' • DDD)



The incomparable Mark Bebbington, to whom British music owes more

than a tip of the hat, turns his attention to the French with a superb new CD of Francis Poulenc. Jan Latham-Koenig and the Royal Philharmonic are collaborators in two of the master's five concertante pieces, and oboist John Roberts and bassoonist Jonathan Davies join Bebbington in striking performances of two chamber works.

Bebbington, Latham-Koenig and the RPO players are so focused on pointing up every expressive moment of these richly allusive concertos, the first and last Poulenc would write, that both emerge as strikingly vivid, despite their myriad subtleties. Amid the Piano Concerto's pellucid textures, no

occasion for dramatic tension is neglected. In the first movement, for instance, Bebbington skilfully shapes and colours the portentous solo chord progressions that elicit varied responses from the orchestra in such a way that you're kept on the edge of your seat, eager to know what direction the musical discourse will take next. The wistfully tender *Andante con moto* makes its way with irresistible poise and directness. The Rondeau finale, alternating between tongue-in-cheek wit and ebullient high spirits, is all the more beguiling for its understatement.

Nigel Simeone's elegant booklet notes indulge in some special pleading for the *Concert champêtre* – commissioned and premiered by the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska – by carefully documenting Poulenc's own performances on piano. But if we're to hear much of this intriguing piece in future, it will likely be on the piano, the steel-frame instruments that Pleyel created for Landowska's revival of the harpsichord having become historical anomalies. In any case, Latham-Koenig and Bebbington bring keen sensitivities for sonority and balance to a performance that is a model of clarity and precision. Bebbington's wholehearted embrace of the piece and his relish for Poulenc's stylishness combine to make the score's occasional archaising seem perfectly natural.

Expert ensemble on a more intimate level rounds out this superbly conceived programme. Roberts, Davies and Bebbington vividly capture the ferment and insouciance of inter-war Paris in the 1926 Trio, a work encouraged by Stravinsky and dedicated to Falla. But it is Roberts and Bebbington's deeply felt reading of the Oboe Sonata, composed during the last summer of Poulenc's life and dedicated to the memory of Prokofiev, that provides the capstone to a recording rich in sensual gratification and intellectual nourishment.

Patrick Rucker

Shostakovich

Symphony No 11, 'The Year 1905', Op 103

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds

Chandos © CHSA5278 (67' • DDD/DSD)



Each time I hear the opening of this symphony – in filmic terms a long slow pan across the frozen forecourt of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg – I immediately think of countless grainy black-and-white documentaries depicting war and

revolution, though not necessarily the one invoked here from 'the year 1905'. It's the programmatic nature of the Eleventh Symphony that has prompted negative criticism over the years, 'filmic' being used as a term of denigration.

But time has revealed a masterpiece of sorts where the 'directness' of expression and more especially the use of revolutionary songs as thematic leitmotifs goes to the very heart of powerful protest – the resistance of state repression whenever and wherever it shows itself. The long cor anglais solo at the heart of the finale – channelling the revolutionary song 'Bare your heads' – might possibly be the single most profound utterance in all Shostakovich.

This is a resounding performance – and a timely reminder of the same team's triumph with the piece at last year's Proms – but more significantly it is a searching, very inward reading, too. John Storgårds favours an expansive, widescreen approach underlining the work's theatricality and lending the big set pieces an implacable power. I'm thinking immediately of the graphic 'Bloody Sunday' massacre sequence in the second movement (much beloved of documentary film-makers) – the dogged, relentless fugue exploding into a brutal tattoo for the entire percussion battery. The sequence encourages a variety of approaches – a dramatic speeding-up or slowing-down as the percussion let rip – but Storgårds keeps his deliberate tempo emphatically and remorselessly on course throughout the whole sequence, emphasising the pitiless, machine-like brutality of it. Especially telling are the rising chromatic grimaces in the trombones as the Tsar's forces menacingly confront the peaceful protest. Scarifying.

The slow movement, 'In memoriam', contains one of the most transformative moments in the entire Shostakovich symphonic canon and that's the major-key modulation into what would be the opening words of the revolutionary song 'You fall as a victim' – 'Welcome the free world of liberty' – radiant in the violins. Storgårds and the BBC Philharmonic strings make something quite special of this – a moment of hope and light amid the surrounding darkness.

Last (but very much not least), the tolling bells of the closing pages and the biggest question of all, 'for whom do they toll'. For this performance – and for the aforementioned Prom date where they thrillingly rang out from the belfry of the Royal Albert Hall – Storgårds and the orchestra deploy four church bells (on loan

from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic) to tremendous effect: an invocation at once ominous and exultant and defiant. Strogårds lets them ring on after the final chord à la Rostropovich – the one thing here I'm not entirely convinced by. For me the abrupt cut-off is more overtly dramatic. Still, a terrific performance and a terrific-sounding disc. **Edward Seckerson**



Shostakovich • Tchaikovsky

Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1, Op 99^a

Stravinsky Élégie^b **Tchaikovsky** Symphony No 5, Op 64^c

^{ab}**Baiba Skride** *vn*

^{ac}**Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Andris Nelsons**

Accentus ⑤  ACC20478; ⑤  ACC10478

(104' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live, May 2019



A cultivated rather than hell-for-leather Tchaikovsky Fifth was the first audio-only recording project of

Andris Nelsons's CBSO years (Orfeo, 10/09). Bearded now and a little stouter, like so many of us, the Latvian conductor directs ensembles with a higher international profile these days. Interpretatively speaking little has changed. This Fifth might even be caricatured as vaguely retro: it features agogic touches that go beyond the discreet tricks inherited from the late Mariss Jansons (qv restraining dynamic levels at the start of a phrase so as to leave room for expansion). The Leipzig team works hard to invigorate old-school expressive intentions with precise, sometimes glorious playing. Both first and second movements get under way in unequivocally Stygian gloom, slower than might have been expected from this generally extrovert maestro. Which is to take nothing away from the *Andante cantabile*'s lovely horn solo or the way the clarinets introduce the work with a haunted, flattish Russian sound. As miked, the brass are inclined to reticence, eschewing any hint of Soviet-style blasting.

The concerto may be just as much of a draw. Baiba Skride is a frequent Nelsons collaborator whose Berg featured in the 2018 engagements that launched the conductor's tenure as local Kapellmeister (Accentus, 11/18). Last year's Shostakovich is of a similar standard though it's only fair to point out that the competition includes their own Berliner Philharmoniker Digital

Concert Hall relay of October 2015 and earlier, audio-only accounts made with other partners. Then again, while Nelsons's Bavarian Radio forces provided exceptionally engaged support for Arabella Steinbacher in 2006 (Orfeo), Skride was assigned Mikko Franck's less stellar Munich Philharmonic (Sony, 8/06). Nelsons is a superb accompanist whose tactfully understated Leipzig backdrop still allows individual players to step up as the invention demands. The Nocturne, patiently paced, is by no means exclusively grey, its low tam-tam strokes blessedly audible. Skride captures a real sense of unease without wearing her heart on her sleeve. In the Scherzo by contrast she contrives a disruptive sprint into the 'Jewish' folk element. The Passacaglia is different again, too clean and linear to be stymied as merely somnambulistic. After the finale's dash to the finishing line the audience is granted an unshowy encore, Stravinsky's literally muted wartime *Élégie*.

Some might prefer tauter, more objective renditions but admirers of these artists need not hesitate. The visual framing of the concert is unexceptionable, the Communist-era hall a known quantity, acoustically sound. A handsome booklet contains nothing on the star performers, focusing instead on the music and its Leipzig connections. **David Gutman**

Tüür

Incantation of Tempest^a. *Sow the Wind ...*^b.

Symphony No 9, 'Mythos'^c

Estonian Festival Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

Alpha ⑤ ALPHA595 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at ^{ab}Pärnu Concert Hall, ^aJuly 2016,

^bJuly 2019; ^cEstonia Concert Hall, Tallinn,

January 2018



It's almost an indulgence to put three such significant, non-concertante orchestral works by Erkki-Sven Tüür, played by a virtuoso orchestra, on a single release. You may want to start backwards, with *Sow the Wind ...* (2015), which despite not being 'the symphony' here is the most instantly satisfying manifestation of Tüür's mature, arguably symphonic (and Nordic) working method: his use of a single gene or 'source code' which mutates and grows to fill the symphonic space and connect the dots.

The technical elements are reflected in the work's concern with reckless human activity destroying the planet, heard in the gathering of small gusts into huge

whirlwinds that tear the texture apart as driving, splintering rhythms threaten to derail the entire juggernaut but end up simply slamming it into a wall of silence. Some parallels exist with the actual symphony here, Tüür's Ninth, commissioned by the Estonian government to mark the country's centenary in 2018. It is dedicated to Järvi and was first performed by his orchestra in the performance captured here, in January of that year.

The work springs from Estonia's Finno-Ugric avian creation myth, thus linking it with Sibelius's *Luonnotar*. Sibelius and Lindberg loom large in the score, which hauls itself up from a rumble and into an inexorable, strained shattering of its own source-code during which an apparently many-headed orchestra seems to want to wrench itself into pieces. The culmination, hard-won thanks to the persistence of a looping upward scale, is one of peace. Tüür has always been generous enough to encourage individual responses to his music and I find it hard not to read this as Estonia's journey to its current state of relative prosperity. The Estonian Festival Orchestra is a physical manifestation of that, and of Estonia's new outward-looking optimism, and can rival its counterpart in Lucerne for reactivity, musicality, charisma and tone. All are apparent in the machinations of *Incantations of Tempest* (2015), commissioned by the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra as an encore but used by the EFO as an opener. It is a muscular piece, minimalistic in concept only and another example of Tüür's fascinating way with the orchestra. **Andrew Mellor**

Weinberg

Symphonies – No 2, Op 30; No 7, Op 81

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra of Polish Radio /

Anna Duczmal-Mróz

Dux ⑤ DUX1631 (67' • DDD)

Weinberg

Flute Concerto No 2, Op 148^a. *Chamber*

Symphonies – No 2, Op 147; No 4, Op 153^a.

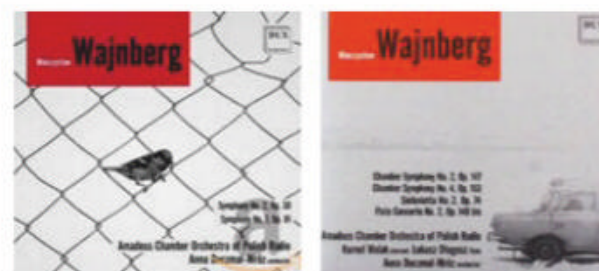
Sinfonietta No 2, Op 74

^a**Łukasz Długosz** *fl* ^c**Kornel Wolak** *cl*

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra of Polish Radio /

Anna Duczmal-Mróz

Dux ⑤ ② DUX1632/3 (100' • DDD)



Whether or not the music of Mieczysław Weinberg makes further inroads in terms



Paavo Järvi brings the music of his fellow Estonian Erkki-Sven Tüür vividly to life in splendid live recordings

of actual performance, his recorded representation shows little sign of slackening. These two releases from Dux are indicative of the renewed interest the country of his birth now takes in his legacy.

The first features two of his symphonies for strings, the Second (1946) arguably the finest of the three from the 1940s in its lucidly Classical outline and deft interplay of motion across three movements featuring almost no fast tempos as such. Anna Duczmal-Mróz proves no less adept than Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla in long-term formal control, her more demonstrative handling of what sounds a larger string group aligning it more closely with Weinberg's early maturity than the valedictory music of his last years. The Seventh (1964) similarly emerges as weightier and more imposing than Thord Svedlund's lithe and incisive reading, the three central movements no less crucial to its cumulative impact than those either side. Dorota Frąckowiak-Kapała dispatches the concertante harpsichord part with manifest assurance.

The other release is spread over two discs, of which the second features just two short works. Duczmal-Mróz secures greater emotional import than Gabriel Chmura from the increasingly oblique trajectory of the Second Sinfonietta (1960), with Łucasz Długosz a more animated soloist than Anders Jonhall in the original orchestral version of the Second Flute Concerto (1987), which is much the most ingratiating of Weinberg's late works. As regards the two chamber symphonies, the Second (also 1987) is likewise conceived on a bigger scale than that from Kremerata Baltica – the initial *Allegro* having a propulsive energy that carries through to the sombre central movement, before the finale *Andante* withholds any semblance of resolution until the very close. Duczmal-Mróz favours a broader approach than Gražinytė-Tyla in the desolate opening *Lento* of the Fourth (1992); timings thereafter are similar but clarinettist Kornel Wolak is slightly more attuned than Mate Bekavac to the klezmer-infused obbligato that comes to the fore as the final *Andantino* progresses uncertainly towards benediction.

Anyone who has the comparisons listed (not forgetting intermittently available Melodiya recordings by Rudolf Barshai of the Second Sinfonietta and Seventh Symphony or Svedlund in the Second Symphony and chamber symphonies on Alto) need not rush to acquire these discs. Those who do will not feel short-changed by the emotive force of Duczmal-Mróz, continuing from her fine account of the Tenth Symphony (CPO) in reaffirming her Weinberg credentials.

Richard Whitehouse

Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:

Kremerata Baltica, Gražinytė-Tyla (6/19) (DG) 483 6566

Symphony No 7 – selected comparison:

Risberg, Gothenburg SO, Svedlund

(6/10) (CHAN) CHSA5078

Chamber Symphonies Nos 2 and 4 – selected comparison:*

*Kremerata Baltica, *Gražinytė-Tyla*

(4/17) (ECM) 481 4604

Sinfonietta No 2 – selected comparison:

Nat Polish RSO, Katowice, Chmura

(11/04) (CHAN) CHAN10237

Flute Concerto No 2 – selected comparison:

Jonhall, Gothenburg SO, Svedlund

(9/08) (CHAN) CHSA5064

Haydn String Quartet Op 20 No 4

The **Dudok Quartet Amsterdam** tell Richard Bratby about their approach to this joyous work

Judith van Driel, first violinist of the Dudok Quartet Amsterdam, is locking up her bicycle when I arrive for our interview. The rest of the group isn't far behind. David Faber has his cello strapped to his back as he pedals along Keisersgracht; and, on reflection, that really is probably the easiest way to transport a cello around central Amsterdam. By the time viola player Marie-Louise de Jong and second violinist Marleen Wester have joined us in a canal-side meeting room, it's clear that this is as unaffected a quartet of musicians as you could hope to meet – they've even brought a chocolate cake. It's hard to imagine a more congenial setting in which to talk about Haydn.

And for this young Dutch quartet, Haydn really is the starting point. The second volume in their recorded cycle of his six quartets Op 20 comes out in May, but their relationship with Haydn goes back to their very first concert, 11 years ago. 'He's a central figure to our musical life,' says Wester. 'When we first met (the three of us, because Marie-Louise joined more recently, in 2017), the very first piece we played was Haydn's Op 20 No 2. There's just something in his language which tells a quartet whether *they* speak the same language – which we did. We had the same taste and the same way of thinking. So we really found each other in Haydn, and then each time we went looking for a new viola player – twice, actually – we came back to Op 20 No 2 just to try them out.'

So is there something particularly testing about that C major Quartet? The opening cello melody, perhaps? 'Well, you want to know if the viola player can play well on the C string,' jokes Faber. De Jong laughs: 'Whether you can play eight notes in time – just the basics.' But we're here to talk about the new album, which includes the extraordinary Quartet in D, Op 20 No 4 – a work that seems, in some ways, to anticipate the entire future history of the string quartet. And it begins softly, with four repeated Ds in octaves.

'Yes, and also it's *Allegro di molto*,' Wester points out. 'When you read that, you expect something completely



'Collective individuality': the Dudok Quartet Amsterdam work as equals, with every opinion respected and explored

different.' Faber jumps in: 'I think we spent lots of hours discussing whether that opening is an up-beat or not. We rehearsed a lot because it's four people having to do exactly the same thing. The execution has to be unified, but from the next section' – from bar seven onwards – 'you immediately want, from each player, individual input which is a bit different.' Van Driel lends her view: 'It begins with five different versions of an opening gesture, and this is something you can really play with – you can try to do each of these five things a little bit differently. It depends on where you're playing, and the time of day: if it's evening or morning, what the time and the feeling is. That's the joy of it.'


Coming from the leader of the group, that sounds like a remarkably relaxed approach. I mention Valentin Berlinsky's memoir of the Borodin Quartet: there was never any doubt about who was in charge there. 'Well, they were Russian and we are Dutch,' says van Driel. 'But it's not *because* we're Dutch.' Wester is quick to agree: 'I also think it's a generational thing.'

Our generation of chamber-music players really likes to work as equals, and I think it's a very healthy way of working.' Van Driel adds: 'Of course, we also have four different egos. It doesn't have to be unanimous in rehearsal. And sometimes we don't even come to a very firm conclusion – we just explore every possibility, and then in concert we can see where it goes.'

The Dudok Quartet's collective individuality (if you like) extends to their bows, which are tailor-made for each member by Luis Emilio Rodríguez Carrington and perfectly weighted to Classical and early Romantic repertoire. 'The density is higher than with modern-design bows, so the energy from your hand gets to the string one and a half times faster. It's more direct and the sound is more focused,' Faber explains. 'Compared with a modern bow, it's more like a laser,' says Wester. 'It's very clear, and that's also a disadvantage because it's not so easy to blend.' Faber scrolls down on his iPad in order to point at bar 72 and then bar 82 of the first movement: high-speed unison passages. 'With modern bows, it sounds as if we're playing together even if it's not completely together; but with these Classical bows, it has to be perfect, otherwise people will notice.'

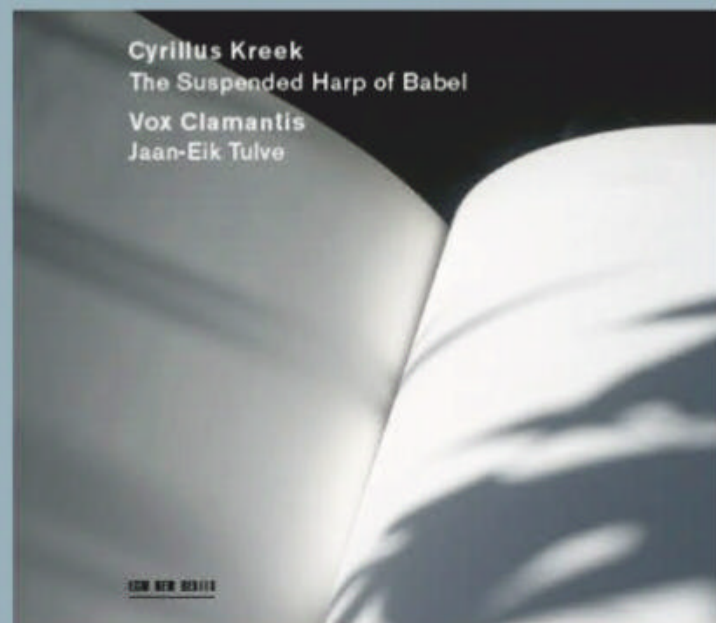
'Haydn tries to make us be extreme, but is considerate of the fact that we are human beings – unlike Beethoven – David Faber, cello'

We scroll on through the second movement's variations. For a quartet whose repertoire extends to Ligeti and Weinberg in one direction and Rameau in the other, placing Haydn in a wider historical context yields some intriguing interpretative insights. 'Compared with, say, the theme of the *Goldberg Variations*, which has a singing character, Haydn's *poco adagio* marking is trying to emphasise the dancelike character which is much more present here,' says Faber. And then there's the minuet, with its *sforzando* cross-rhythms: 'I think he's trying to make us be quite extreme, but he's always considerate of the fact that we are also human beings – which is the big difference between him and Beethoven. Haydn tries to tempt players to be as good as they can be, in a very welcoming way. With Beethoven, it's as if he's trying to force us – to generate friction. But there's no friction between us and Haydn: we're willing to do whatever he asks.'

And every good quartet player is more than happy to do what Haydn asks in the brilliant, endlessly inventive finale of Op 20 No 4. The piece ends as it begins, quietly. How do the players handle that deceptively simple pay-off? 'It's just the end,' says Wester. 'It's as though we leave the room and close the door. I've thought about it, and it's like we're leaving the stage and saying, "That was it. Thank you." And that's also a joke.' If this quartet is a conversation between friends, it's one that needs (and expects) to be overheard. There's still some coffee in the pot, and some cake on the table, and as we close our scores Faber recalls a piece of advice from one of the group's mentors, Peter Cropper of the Lindsay Quartet. 'Of course, we want to find something personal in the music, but we don't want to keep it to ourselves. In his masterclasses, Peter always said that when you make a great cake, you just want to share it.' 

The second and concluding volume of the Dudok Quartet Amsterdam's Haydn Op 20 cycle is released on Resonus Classics on May 1

ECM NEW SERIES

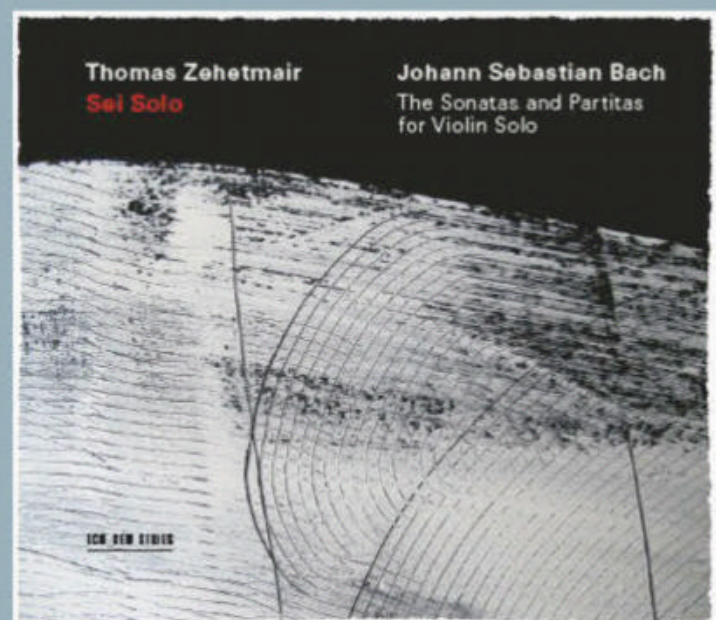


CD 481 9041

Cyrillus Kreek
The Suspended Harp of Babel

Vox Clamantis / Jaan-Eik Tulve conductor
Marco Ambrosini, Angela Ambrosini nyckelharpa
Anna-Liisa Eller kannel

Revelatory performances of the choral music of Estonian composer Cyrillus Kreek (1889–1962), incorporating graceful settings of psalms and folk hymns juxtaposed here with instrumental fantasias and interludes created for this recording by Marco Ambrosini.



2-CD Set 481 8558

Johann Sebastian Bach
The Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo

Thomas Zehetmair Baroque violin

"With gut strings and playing without chin or shoulder rests, Zehetmair is able to bring a huge range of tonal nuance and colour to these pieces, hauntingly caught by the resonant acoustic... hugely rewarding."

The Guardian

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Chamber



Charlotte Gardner hears Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann:

'The Nash Ensemble's readings firmly place this music not in a salon but in a concert hall' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



David Threasher listens to polished accounts of Mozart's piano quartets:

'This is a more intimate performance than some: the four players play for each other, rather than for the back wall' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**

Beethoven

'The Complete String Quartets,
Vol 3 – Apotheosis'

String Quartets – No 5, Op 18 No 5; No 6,
Op 18 No 6; No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95; No 13,
Op 130; No 14, Op 131; Grosse Fuge, Op 133

Casals Quartet

Harmonia Mundi ® ③ HMM90 2406/8
(165' • DDD)



As Teodor Currentzis remarked about recording Beethoven's symphonies, there is

a danger, even in sets of such exceptional character as this one, that powerfully individual performances may diminish one another by proximity. The view from Scafell Pike is hardly less momentous, satisfying or arduously attained for standing in the lee of Scafell itself.

The harmony of each musical vista is achieved by imaginative means. Assessing the cycle's two previous instalments (9/18, 5/19), Richard Bratby welcomed the training of focus on a particular movement, like a landmark. In Op 18 No 5 it's the variation third movement that acquires a centre of gravity. Launching the theme with pure tone like a skiff on a lake, the Casals Quartet sail through the variations in a spirit of playful serenity, anticipating the celestial and rustic visions of the *Harp* Quartet, the *Pastoral* Symphony and the *Missa solemnis*.

Until very recently, minimal vibrato (or none) was deployed by quartets as an expressive device, to chill the bones of a phrase or to lift its eyes heavenwards. Now, measured on a scale of expressive vibrato, it's the other way around. Pure tone is the lingua franca of the Casals Quartet's Beethoven, singing with drooping wings like an Italian madrigal in the graveside introduction to the finale of Op 18 No 6 while also imparting a gentle, Biedermeier nostalgia to the central *Andante* of Op 131 and a refreshing simplicity to the second section of the

Grosse Fuge. The eruptions of Op 95 naturally generate more heat in the phrasing and fingering and, in the hands of the Casals, this is the quartet that most uncannily anticipates the breakdown of diatonic harmony with the Second Viennese School.

However, this is not Beethoven-playing that shakes a fist at the listener. For 'character', read characters: there are five individual personalities at work. Leading the Op 18 set and otherwise playing second fiddle, Abel Tomàs Realp seems to skate with daredevil confidence on a hair's breadth of tone. Vera Martínez Mehner leads the Cavatina of Op 130 with admirable humility – the *Beklemmt* section ushers in a further intensification of collective grief rather than the lead mourner's ecstasy of grief commonly encountered – but otherwise the microphone catches a quartet of temperaments distinct from, say, the Hagen Quartet's notable unanimity of musical thought and gesture.

I like especially the Casals's account of Op 131, fearless and unsullied by irony, but Op 130 is presented as the culmination – the 'apotheosis' – of the whole cycle, more spaciouly conceived in proportion than its companions. The raw nerves, the adrenalin-fuelled accents and positive energy of the Quartet's Beethoven style are channelled into a reading that achieves a notable integration of motivic development from first movement to last – the *Grosse Fuge* – with Beethoven's alternative presented very much as an elegantly wrought second thought looking back to Haydn and the world of Op 18. Recent, more disruptive approaches to Op 130 from the Elias (Wigmore Hall Live, 3/17) and Belcea Quartets (Alpha, 8/13) demand attention, and I won't be throwing out the LaSalle and other old favourites. The Casals, however, present a compelling yet familiar picture of Beethoven, generating tension and taking a forensic approach to detail in the manner of a modern police procedural.

Peter Quantrill

Beethoven

'Piano Trios, Vol 1'

Piano Trios – No 3, Op 1 No 3; No 6, Op 70 No 2.
Allegretto, WoO39

Sitkovetsky Trio

BIS ® BIS2239 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Did any composer make a bigger splash with their Op 1 than Beethoven? Taking

what had hitherto been a small-scale domestic medium, he turned the piano trio into a symphony for three instruments that challenged all but the finest amateur players. In the first two Op 1 Trios Beethoven still speaks the language of the comedy of manners as perfected by Haydn and Mozart. With No 3, in the quintessential Beethoven key of C minor, he produced a work of mingled explosiveness and lyrical yearning whose firece subjectivity reportedly fazed his erstwhile teacher Haydn.

Admired in these columns for their Mendelssohn, Smetana, Dvořák et al, the Sitkovetsky are equally impressive in Beethoven. Like the Florestan, in their superb Hyperion series, they combine a sense of dialectical urgency, crucial in this work, with a natural conversational intimacy. Pianist Wu Qian, first among equals in this music, has a limpid, sparkling touch, using the pedal sparingly. While I occasionally wanted slightly more 'bite' from the cello, balance is sensitively judged; rhythms are both strong and pliable; and more than in most performances – not least in the work's mysterious ending, perfectly judged here – you're aware of how much of the score is marked *piano* and *pianissimo*. At a slightly broader tempo, the Florestan find that much more tenderness and quizzical grace amid the turbulence of the opening *Allegro*. And I prefer the Florestan's brisker gait – a true 'walking' *Andante* – for the second movement, though there's much delicacy and charm in the Sitkovetsky's rather more reflective reading.



Conversational intimacy: the Sitkovetsky Trio bring imaginative flair to their first volume of Beethoven piano trios

From its musing, improvisatory opening, truly *dolce*, as Beethoven demands, the glorious E flat Trio, Op 70 No 2, is hardly less enjoyable. As in Op 1 No 3, the Sitkovetsky combine a command of tension over long spans with piquant, finely observed detail. The first movement's waltzing second theme is delightfully airborne and the *pianissimo* lead-up to the recapitulation – a thrilling moment – beautifully realised. The *Allegretto ma non troppo*, so prophetic of Schubert, is subtly and tenderly phrased, with an ideal relaxed lilt; and with a close and eager interplay between strings and piano, the Sitkovetsky relish the element of playful fantasy in the finale.

Doubts creep in only with the second-movement *Allegretto*, where Beethoven pays homage to the C minor-major variations in Haydn's *Drumroll* Symphony. The Sitkovetsky play this *con amore*, with a filigree delicacy in the first major-key variation. But by interpreting Beethoven's prescribed *Allegretto* as a subdued *Andante*, they rather miss the buoyancy and, in the Hungarian-style C minor variations, the stomping rusticity so well caught by the Florestan. For many, though, this could boil down to taste. Marrying polish and

imaginative flair, minutely attentive to what the composer wrote, the Sitkovetsky's Beethoven stands up well in a crowded field and whets the appetite for future instalments. **Richard Wigmore**

Selected comparison:

Florestan Trio (3/03, 12/04) (HYPE)

CDA67327 and CDA67466 (oas) or CDS44471/4

Busoni

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 29; No 2, Op 36a

Ingolf Turban *vn* **Ilja Scheps** *pf*

CPO © CPO555 213-2 (61' • DDD)



Although published in 1901 as Op 36a, Busoni considered his Second Violin Sonata to be his actual Op 1, dismissing his earlier compositions as irredeemably immature. Structurally, the sonata resembles Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op 109, with a furious and succinct dance in 6/8 sandwiched between a supple first movement and a wide-ranging set of theme and variations. As with much of Busoni's output, the music's technical demands are considerable, yet here the overarching tone

is lyrical. Holding it all together is perhaps the greatest challenge, and Ingolf Turban and Ilja Scheps do a fine job, for the most part. They capture the exploratory mood of the opening *Langsam*, savouring its subtle shifts of mood. Perhaps the central tarantella-like *Presto* could be more unbuttoned but I admire the way the musicians bind the jagged phrases together.

It's in the finale where I wish the performance was a bit more rapturous. Scheps is superb throughout – listen to how he makes the bass octaves sing at 2'25" in the fifth variation (track 12), for example – but Turban can be a bit prosaic in a work that demands exceptional eloquence so as not to come across as diffuse and aimless. Kremer and Afanassiev (DG, 12/88) almost convince me this sonata is a masterpiece, and Joseph Lin and Benjamin Loeb (Naxos) are nearly as persuasive.

Turban is more impressive in the discursive First Sonata, with its odd blend of Brahms and Liszt. He and Scheps hold the opening *Allegro deciso* taut at a relatively relaxed tempo – unlike Per Enoksson and Kathryn Scott (BIS), who barrel through it – and their varied

MARK BEBBINGTON

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The Observer



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articulation gives the slow movement a much-needed sense of shape. If Lin and Loeb find greater subtlety in the finale, Turban and Scheps provide more bravura excitement. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Grieg · Hemsing

Grieg Three Violin Sonatas

Hemsing Homecoming

Eldbjørg Hemsing *vn* **Simon Trpčeski** *pf*

BIS (F) BIS2456 (73' • DDD/DSD)



Game of Tones?
I know it's not the
done thing to
comment on CD

covers, but when an artist has made an effort to look striking, it surely deserves mention. Eldbjørg Hemsing stands in a brooding northern landscape, looking utterly commanding; an image which everything about this disc supports. It's not the only possible approach, by any means, but if you hear Grieg's violin sonatas as wild, fantastic tales of adventure and romance from the distant north, these three magnificent performances should certainly hit the spot.

Hemsing and Simon Trpčeski come hard on the heels of more homespun interpretations by Elena Urioste and Tom Poster, and to call them a powerhouse pairing is to do a grave injustice to the poetry, playfulness and style that they bring to performances that are – on the whole – on a heroic scale. Typically, Trpčeski creates a setting: opening vast spaces with the soft opening chords of the First Sonata, building grandiloquent climaxes or giving exactly the right springiness to a dance-finale. Hemsing takes the role of an adventurer in these sonic landscapes: combining a gleaming virtuoso panache with whispered, deep-toned confidences on the lower strings.

But they always play as a team. Listen to how they trade phrases at the opening of the finale of the Third Sonata, while Trpčeski simultaneously maintains both a background tension and a sense of forward momentum. They're impulsive too; if I have one reservation, it's that their immersion in the musical moment occasionally makes Grieg's sonata structures feel slightly episodic. But the passion and flair of these performances is ample recompense: pristine recorded sound and a fiery unaccompanied encore composed by Hemsing herself are the icing on the cake. **Richard Bratby**

Grieg – selected comparison:

Urioste, Poster (5/20) (ORCH) ORC100126

Haydn

String Quartets, Op 20 – No 1; No 4; No 6

Dudok Quartet

Resonus (F) RES10262 (66' • DDD)



Though it garnered enthusiastic reviews elsewhere, the Dudok's first volume

of Haydn's epoch-making Op 20 quartets slipped through the *Gramophone* net. This follow-up confirms the young Dutch ensemble's Haydn credentials in performances that combine technical polish (immaculate tuning, balance and ensemble), boundless vitality and a lively response to the specific character of each movement.

Fast movements, invariably taken briskly, unfold with a powerful sense of logical growth (not for nothing does the quartet take its name from the Dutch architect Willem Dudok). Other quartets, including the Doric and, using gut strings, the Chiaroscuro, treat the opening movements more flexibly, more quizzically. At times, especially in the eyes-down, straight-ahead *Allegro moderato* of No 1, the Dudok might seem a shade hard-driven. But while I don't catch much of Haydn's prescribed *scherzando* playfulness in the bounding first movement of No 6 (the Doric are spot-on here), the Dudok bring an exhilarating sweep to the rapid modulations of the central development. You'd go far to hear a fierier performance of No 4's opening *Allegro*, here *di molto* indeed, with the players vaulting over the bar line, always thinking in long spans; and the Dudok predictably relish the explosive outbursts and coruscating contrapuntal interplay of the gypsy-flavoured finale.

Predictably, too, the Dudok favour pacy minuets. This must be the fastest, fiercest performance on disc of the crazy *zingarese* minuet-gavotte of No 4 but the players bring it off brilliantly. Elsewhere they make a vivid contrast between No 1's springy Minuet and musing Trio, and treat the Minuet of No 6, delightfully, as a light-footed waltz.

The Dudok's clear-eyed directness does not seem quite enough in the *Adagio* of No 6, a rapt violin solo with subtle touches of viola colouring. Both the Doric and the delicate, improvisatory Chiaroscuro touched me more deeply here. But the Dudok give a fine-drawn performance of No 4's poignant *Poco adagio* variations, from their sensitive

voicing of the theme to the mounting tension of the sequences in the coda. Other groups, not least the Doric, have brought more hushed inwardness to No 1's glorious *Affettuoso e sostenuto*. Yet the Dutch group vindicate their flowing tempo, phrasing in long, seamless lines, colouring subtly and gently pointing Haydn's strange harmonic progressions. It's hard, of course, for any quartet to satisfy completely in such rich and demanding music. The Dudok sometimes left me a touch breathless. Far more often, though, I was exhilarated by the mingled virtuosity, finesse and coursing energy of these performances.

Richard Wigmore

Selected comparisons:

Doric Qt (12/14) (CHAN) CHAN10831

Chiaroscuro Qt (A/16, 9/17) (BIS) BIS2158/68 (oas)

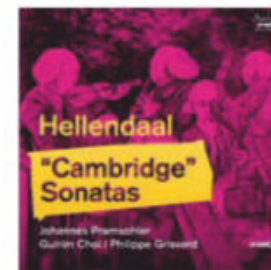
Hellendaal

Six 'Cambridge' Sonatas

Johannes Pramsohler *vn* **Gulrim Choi** *vc*

Philippe Grisvard *hpd*

Audax (F) ADX13720 (69' • DDD)



Johannes Pramsohler unearths long-forgotten Baroque gems, then presents them to the world via a superlative premiere recording. It's now a familiar pattern, and one I'm pleased as punch to be enjoying another dose of here.

The Dutch violinist Pieter Hellendaal was the last in a lofty line of Continental late-Baroque violinists who chose to settle in England, following in the footsteps of such names as Francesco Geminiani and Nicola Matteis. He arrived in 1751 in London, where he played between acts of Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. However, it was Cambridge where he eventually settled a decade later, and thus it's in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum that you can find the manuscripts to his Op 3 set of 12 violin sonatas – works clearly in the line of Corelli, preserved complete with numerous sketched-out cadenzas, ornamentations and alternatives, and employing the full gamut of bowing technique and acrobatics which no doubt were bestowed upon Hellendaal by his teacher, the virtuoso violinist and bowing pedagogue Giuseppe Tartini.

It's the first six of the set Pramsohler has chosen to record with his Ensemble Diderot colleagues, the cellist Gulrim Choi and harpsichordist Philippe Grisvard, and their readings bring such poetic vibrancy to the sonatas' luxurious

ornamentation and richness of articulation that it's unarguable that this music's value stretches well beyond the historic performance pearls they bestow.

Pramsohler on a 1713 Rogeri is a treat, bringing all manner of colours and shadings and delicious curves to the violin's often highly virtuoso lines, peerless evenness to the double-stopping and beautiful weighting of parts to the contrapuntal writing. Then listen to the throbbing, birdlike song he makes of the high-register intricacies tucked into the cadenza of No 4's *Allegro*, or its affecting bariolage. Meanwhile, Choi on a mid-18th-century cello by the London maker J Simpson, and Grisvard on a harpsichord after a 1769 Pascal Taskin, are superglued to his side in all respects. Melodies sing; fugues dance along with light-as-air ease.

The architecture of the programming itself is also satisfying, the six sonatas having been mixed so as the three whose introductory movements are showcases for improvised embellishment – Nos 2, 4 and 6 – occupy the recording's beginning, middle and end points.

If these musical enchanters fancy recording the set's final six, then that's fine by me. **Charlotte Gardner**

Fanny Mendelssohn • C Schumann

Fanny Mendelssohn Piano Trio, Op 11. String Quartet **C Schumann** Piano Trio, Op 17

The Nash Ensemble

Hyperion © CDA68307 (72' • DDD)



Extraordinary as it sounds, I think this may be the first time that the string-

ensemble chamber music of Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn has been paired together on a recording, rather than with corresponding works by Robert and Felix. At the very least it's a first from a major ensemble, and the impression of this music being taken seriously on its own merits only intensifies when you press play.

First up is Schumann's Piano Trio in G minor. Composed in 1846, before Robert composed his Third Trio in the same key, this work thoroughly busted all preconceptions of its time over what constituted feminine-sounding music and about the female capacity to deal with rigorous form – listen out for the fugal writing in the final movement. Indeed, the violinist Joseph Joachim actually

commented that he couldn't believe that 'a woman could have composed something so sound and serious'; and sound and serious is precisely what The Nash Ensemble have given us. This is a strong, proud, full-blooded reading, full of contrasts in tone, attack and mood, nuanced in its colourings, its phrasing and overall architecture deftly shaped, long lines soaring taut and strong, choppy tempestuousness tightly knit, strings sounding bright and clean against the piano's warm tones. These are readings that firmly place Schumann's music not in a salon but in a concert hall.

Likewise Mendelssohn's Trio in D minor with its *Sturm und Drang*, Simon Crawford-Phillips rising with elegant broodiness to the stormily tossing and turning virtuosity of its opening piano figures, before the strings meet their own subsequent constant virtuosities with polished panache, always firmly glued together and blending impeccably. Adrian Brendel serves up some especially delicious cello colours: for instance the soft, tense pathos with which he slidingly descends his scale at 9'42", anticipating the movement's sombre close. Then Crawford-Phillips again thoroughly sets the tone for the finale with his folkily poignant Chopinesque figures in lieu of the strings' further fire.

Mendelssohn's Quartet brings more to admire, with the devastating stillness and simplicity of the first movement, the tense momentum of the *Allegretto* with its bitily gruff flutterings from viola and cello, the Romanze's deftly spun-out long lines and the fiery pizzazz and crisp energy of the finale.

To say this disc makes the case for Schumann and Mendelssohn standing on their own two feet, away from the music of their menfolk, is something of an understatement. **Charlotte Gardner**

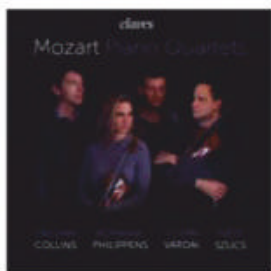
Mozart

Piano Quartets – No 1, K478; No 2, K493

Rosanne Philippens vn **Máté Szücs** va

István Várdai vc **Finghin Collins** vc

Claves © 50-3002 (68' • DDD)



A Dutch violinist and Hungarian viola player and cellist coalesce around the Irish pianist Finghin Collins in Mozart's two piano quartets – works that, for all their myriad wonders, perhaps aren't heard as much as they should be. One wonders if such a pleasure was bestowed

last year on Irish audiences, as these players have collaborated as chamber musicians in festivals there; perhaps this recording was the result of one such performance. The feeling of a well-established association is certainly evident here.

The recording venue, St Peter's Church of Ireland in Drogheda (along with Claves' engineering), allows more space around each instrument than the Pierre Boulez Saal and DG in Berlin for Barenboim *père et fils* and friends but the tonal integration achieved as a result is a worthwhile dividend. After a perhaps slightly mannered opening to the G minor First Quartet, the expansive *Allegro* unfolds with unrestrained inevitability. The playfulness of both finales is presented without gimmick and the slow movements are not unduly indulged.

This is thus a more intimate performance than the Barenboim: the four players play for each other, rather than for the back wall of the building. Yet the music is not undersold as a result. Balance and poise, rather than any hint of grandstanding, become the order of the day here in a recording that feels the more special for its shying away from playing to the gallery, allowing these two wonderful pieces to reveal their secrets gently and attractively.

David Threasher

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

D & M Barenboim, Deyneka, Soltani

(A/18) (DG) 483 5255GH

Ravel • Stravinsky

Ravel Two Violin Sonatas^a **Stravinsky**

The Firebird – Suite (arr Moutouzkine).

Three Movements from Petrushka

^a**Chloé Kiffer** vn **Alexandre Moutouzkine** pf

Steinway & Sons © STNS30103 (66' • DDD)



To follow up his Steinway & Sons label debut devoted to Cuban piano

music, the Russian/American pianist Alexandre Moutouzkine charts relatively familiar territory. His own transcription of Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite differs from the Guido Agosti version in that it includes two extra sections (the Introduction and 'Dance of the Firebird'), and also in regard to Moutouzkine's more overtly virtuoso piano-writing. He subjects the 'Infernal Dance' and 'Final Hymn' to a wider array of technical fireworks, from

lightning-quick scales in all directions to fistfuls of big, booming chords. It may sound like Stravinsky filtered through Liszt but Moutouzkine gets away with it on account of his frighteningly authoritative fingerwork and a sonority that can fill a stadium.

In the *Three Movements from Petrushka*, Moutouzkine focuses on nailing the tricky textural details to the point where the melodic trajectory weaves in and out of focus, in contrast to Beatrice Rana's far more proportioned and effortless traversal (Warner Classics, 11/19). But the pianist captures the lyrical melancholy of 'Chez Pétrouchka' well, not to mention his superb handling of the extensive *marcato* passages of 'La semaine grassé', even if Yuja Wang (DG, 7/10) and Maurizio Pollini (DG, 6/72) remain nonpareil for lightness and shimmer.

The violinist Chloé Kiffer joins for Ravel's two sonatas. Her pure and focused tone makes for an attractive foil to Moutouzkine's hearty pianism and their impassioned, big-boned interpretation keeps the music moving forwards and upwards, minimising its rambling qualities. That said, I still prefer the recording by Leonidas Kavakos and Peter Nagy (ECM, 2/04)

for its wider scope of expressive and colouristic nuance. Conversely, Moutouzkine's slightly heavy touch in the G major Sonata's *Allegretto* pales next to Jeremy Denk's ethereal phrasing and harmonic awareness in collaboration with Joshua Bell. The duo strike a perfect balance in the central 'Blues' movement, where Kiffer's delicious portamentos are right on the money, stylistically speaking. Aside from their witty imitative repartee at the third movement's outset, Kiffer and Moutouzkine seem careful and microphone-shy in the 'Perpetuum mobile' when measured next to the deft interplay and brisker pace of the Jansen/Golan (Decca, 11/10), Ehnes/Chen (CBC) and Mullova/Canino (Decca, 8/90) recordings. Fine sound and brief yet well-written notes by Adam Hockman. **Jed Distler**

Telemann

'La querelleuse'

Concerto a 4, TWV43:a3. Fantasias - No 3, TWV40:4; No 11, TWV40:12; No 12, TWV40:25. Overture-Suite, 'La querelleuse', TWV55:G8. Trio Sonatas, TWV42 - a1; E4; g9. Die Zufriedenheit, TWV20:29

The Counterpoints with **Kristen Witmer** *sop*

Robert de Bree *ob* **Alon Portal** *db*

Etcetera © KTC1652 (69' • DDD)



This debut disc is, hands down, some of the best recorded

Telemann out there, and I am ready to go fist to fist with anyone who disagrees. The Counterpoints, joined by three 'friends' for the tracks with larger forces such as the wonderful cantata *Die Zufriedenheit*, bring an entirely fresh yet sensitive approach to Telemann's solo and chamber music. Indeed, the disc teems with what must surely be the sounds of four people who simply love making music together: there is something wonderfully coherent and cohesive about their ensemble-playing.

Certainly, this can be attributed to education: the four musicians of The Counterpoints are united in the Dutch schooling of period performance, and all studied at some point at the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague. But there seems to be something beyond this too. Their sound abounds with youthful optimism, charged throughout with an intelligence and gestural integrity to Telemann's notation that is not once acerbically applied. Any blemishes that

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BRITISH VIOLIN SONATAS

Jeremy Dibble listens to two splendid albums that mine the rich seam of repertoire found in the 20th-century violin sonata in Britain



Emotional vigour: the experienced partnership of Tasmin Little and Piers Lane play with nuanced lyricism

'British Violin Sonatas, Vol 3'

Alwyn Sonatina **Bowen** Violin Sonata, Op 112

Coates First Meeting **JF Brown** The Hart's

Grace **Ireland** Violin Sonata No 2

Tasmin Little *vn* **Piers Lane** *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20133 (70' • DDD)

'British Violin Sonatas'

Alwyn Sonatina **L Berkeley** Elegy, Op 33 No 2.

Toccata, Op 33 No 3 **Jacob** Caprice. Elegy.

Little Dancer **Leighton** Violin Sonata No 1

Rawsthorne Pierrette: Valse Caprice

Walton Sonatina

Clare Howick *vn* **Simon Callaghan** *pf*

Somm © SOMMCD0610 (72' • DDD)



The rich repertoire of the British 20th-century violin sonata, surely one of the richest national repertoires of its era, bears witness to the sheer variety and inspiration the medium elicited from its creators. Perhaps only the symphony or symphonic poem may compare with it in terms of fecundity. The third volume of

'British Violin Sonatas' on Chandos championed by Tasmin Little and Piers Lane adds two major sonatas – by York Bowen (1945) and John Ireland's Sonata No 2 (1915-17) – to those of Bridge, Ireland, Bliss, Walton and Ferguson on Vols 1 and 2. On Somm, Clare Howick and Simon Callaghan have recorded two more major sonatas, by William Walton (1948) and Kenneth Leighton's Sonata No 1 (1948). Both recordings, as it happens, share a recording of William Alwyn's Sonatina (c1933); otherwise the two albums provide an array of attractive violin miniatures (itself a rich tapestry of invention) by Alan Rawsthorne and Lennox Berkeley, and premiere recordings of pieces by Gordon Jacob, Eric Coates and James Francis Brown.

John Ireland's Sonata No 2 in A minor made a deep impression when Albert Sammons and William Murdoch first performed the work in London in 1917. Both performers were in military uniform, serving in the Grenadier Guards, a reminder that war was still furiously raging in Europe. Though the work radiates the composer's individual sense of lyricism, a streak of anger and frustration runs through much of the work (notably the angular and acerbic opening of the first movement); its polemic stance almost certainly influenced EJ Moeran's Sonata (1923) among others. Little brings out this stark contrast with impressive aplomb, the wonderful emergence of the effulgent second subject from the bleaker first being one such example. Lane's nuanced handling of the capacious accompaniment is also insightfully executed; indeed, this is even more the case with Bowen's imposing Sonata, Op 112, written at the end of the Second World War and dedicated to Peggy Radmall, later a prominent pedagogical figure in teaching the violin. It is a fiery, romantic work (witness the grand opening of the first movement) and both performers bring a rhythmic and emotional vigour to Bowen's contrapuntal score, a piece which still betrays its strong late 19th-century roots.

Although more overtly 20th-century in origin, the sonatas by Walton and Leighton, both of which date from 1948, also betray potent romantic characteristics. Howick's flexible tone is well suited to the fragile dissonance of Walton's harmony and the prevalence of seventh intervals in the composer's thematic shapes (rather similar to the Violin Concerto of 1939) is prudently combined with some tasteful application of portamento. Callaghan's

clean accompaniment provides a sympathetic backdrop, especially in the substantial character variations of the second movement. Leighton's Sonata, written when the composer was barely 19, provides further evidence of his prodigious talent as a young man. Both performers are at their best in the striking slow movement, whose more pulsating, melancholy strains contrast with the more passionate élan of the outer movements.

The varied hues and shades of Howick's timbral range are well suited to the array of short pieces that fill the rest of the disc. Written in 1934 as a wedding present for Rawsthorne's first wife, Jessie Hinchcliffe, the *Pierrette: Valse Caprice* is a delightful, quirky piece of quicksilver, as is the *moto perpetuo* of Berkeley's Toccata. This and the somewhat brooding Elegy, two of three miniatures written as Op 33 for Frederick Grinke in 1951, receive sympathetic interpretations, and the three little essays by Gordon Jacob, one of Stanford's last pupils at the RCM, exude that typical polish of a composer now unjustly neglected. Little's choice of miniatures includes Coates's delicious *First Meeting: Souvenir*, originally written for Lionel Tertis's viola in 1941 and revised two years later for violin; its soaring lines (stunningly sustained by Little's fulsome tone) became an expression of familial affection for his son, Austin, on his 21st birthday. A more numinous iridescence haunts much of *The Hart's Grace*, written for the Hertfordshire Festival of Music in 2016 by James Francis Brown (b1969).

Although Alwyn disowned his Sonatina for violin and piano of 1933 (an attitude he brought to much of his work before 1940), an examination of his music from this period reveals a process of rapid technical and stylistic assimilation (which Alwyn took for inadequacy) in which music of inventive promise belies the composer's harsh self-criticism. Published in 2010, the Sonatina only received one performance in the composer's lifetime, in 1935. Now, like the fortunes of the No 10 bus, two recordings have turned up at the same time. Little's recording has an extrovert, feel-good factor, expressed in those long melodic lines she projects so instinctively, eminently supported by Lane's robust gestures. Howick's reading is a tad more introspective, less gesticulative perhaps; but there is much to admire in her more pensive interpretation of the slow movement and the crispness of her bowing in the jaunty finale. **G**

I ascribe here are thus merely the traces of sheer pleasure I have had in being able to listen to this disc on unbridled repeat this month.

The structure, which alternates between Telemann's chamber music and solo Fantasia movements (much like the recent release from Elephant House Quartet – Pentatone, 12/19), though not particularly unique, is well coordinated. Though all four musicians contribute stunning solo performances, Thomas Triesschijs's Fantasia on recorder, an arrangement of the G major for solo flute, warrants particular praise. Triesschijs's sound is beguiling, real edge-of-your-seat, ears-wide-open stuff. The short-lived *Adagio* is utterly tantalising (and at this point, praise must also go to the crack team of sound engineers and producers for exceptional quality throughout).

Most delightful is the group's ability to plunge head-deep into a myriad of affective sound worlds with the slippery mystery of a criminal in the night. In the space of a bar line, we are taken from *galant* gaiety to penetrating gravity. In the central *Largo* of the Trio Sonata in G minor, TWV42:g9, Triesschijs's arpeggiation possesses the quality attributed to mercy by Shakespeare's Portia – 'It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven' – or, as in the opening *Affettuoso* of the Trio Sonata in A minor, TWV42:a1, we can almost smell the storm on the horizon.

The Counterpoints draw out the sensuous in Telemann's music, all the while with superb intonation and flairful phrasing. Violinist Matthea de Muynck makes a sumptuous sound on her Amati reconstruction, though her trills in some movements, such as the A minor *Grave*, are somewhat set on default mode (Triesschijs's ornamentation in this movement is also slightly saccharine). Would Etcetera Records have engineered a booklet that contained the notes without their falling out upon opening, this would be an almost faultless object.

Mark Seow

'Treasures from the New World'

Beach Piano Quintet, Op 67^a. Romance^b

Nobre Poema XXI, Op 94 No 21^a

Oswald Piano Quintet, Op 18^a

Clélia Iruzun *pf*

^a**Coull Quartet**

(^bRoger Coull, Philip Gallaway *vns*

Jonathan Barritt *va* Nicholas Roberts *vc*)

Somm © SOMMCDO609 (67' • DDD)



'Treasures from the United States and Brazil' in truth for this

warmly recorded and passionately played new disc. This is the fourth recording currently listed in the Presto Classical database of Amy Beach's substantial, Brahmsian Piano Quintet (1907) and Clélia Iruzun's performance with the Coull Quartet is beautifully paced, with more accentuated differences in tempo than with the main rivals by Ambache (a fine all-Beach programme) and Roscoe (coupled with works by Rebecca Clarke). While this makes it the slowest available, it is not unnaturally so and allows the music more room to breathe; ultimately, preferences will come down to couplings. The 1893 Romance has no fewer than eight competitors (how times have changed in the fortunes of this composer) but Iruzun and Coull need fear no comparisons.

Brazilian-born Henrique Oswald (1852-1931) is fairly well served on CD, largely for his smaller piano pieces, not least his most popular work, *Il neige* (of which there are several recordings, including two of transcriptions for guitar duet). The Piano Quintet (1895) is substantial, its four movements (the sparkling Scherzo placed second) more redolent of Schumann than Brahms, so makes a nice foil to the Beach. That said, its beautiful, rather nocturnal third movement, *Molto adagio*, is not just the heart of the quintet but the apex of the whole programme.

Marlos Nobre (b1939) may be more familiar as a name, although his discography is less extensive, restricted largely to anthologies. The best introduction to his music is a disc of piano music recorded by Iruzun for Lorelt. *Poema XXI* is one of a continuing series of arrangements by the composer of a lilting melody from his *Concertante do Imaginário* (1989; incidentally also recorded by Iruzun for Lorelt). It's a delight, as is the disc as a whole.

Guy Rickards

Beach Piano Quintet – selected comparisons:

Roscoe, Endellion Qt (10/95) (ASV) CDDCA932

Ambache (12/99) (CHAN) CHAN9752

Arthur Grumiaux

Tully Potter applauds the popular Belgian violinist – his playing strong yet graceful, his technique unobtrusive – who formed a robust yet short-lived partnership with Clara Haskil

Arthur Grumiaux was the greatest post-war Belgian violinist and one of the ‘perfect five’ of the 1950s and ’60s, with Heifetz, Milstein, Oistrakh and Kogan. He was the fiddler for those who think they dislike the violin: his immaculate playing and supple tone won him millions of friends.

Born on March 21, 1921, in the village of Villers-Perwin, Hainaut province, Walloon region, he told Alan Blyth in January 1971’s *Gramophone*: ‘My parents, who were not rich, were always out at work and I was virtually brought up by my grandparents.’ His maternal grandfather Joseph Fichet, an amateur bandmaster who played trumpet, clarinet, violin and piano and kept a sheet-music shop in Fleurus, saw Grumiaux imitate violin-playing with two sticks and taught him music theory with matchsticks. When Grumiaux was three and a half, Fichet discovered that his grandson had perfect pitch – he could correctly identify the pitches of church bells.

In May 1926, following on from violin lessons from his grandfather, he auditioned for the Charleroi Conservatoire. In the absence of director Fernand Quinet (composer and former Pro Arte Quartet cellist), he was accepted by Hermann Henry – both men would be mentors. Most important was his time in the Brussels Conservatoire class of Alfred Dubois (1898-1949), a great violinist who is almost forgotten but who in the 1930s was at his peak as a player and teacher. A star pupil of Alexandre Cornélis, Dubois studied further with Ysaÿe and was one of the master’s few pupils to make a solo career. He played in the Belgian Court Trio and in a duo with pianist Marcel Maas.

‘Family trees’ of violin teachers and pupils rarely tell us much, but the noble line of Ysaÿe–Dubois–Grumiaux–Dumay is

an exception. In their recordings the family resemblance is palpable, and one can hear how Dubois shaped Grumiaux, whose playing was strong yet graceful, with unfailingly beautiful tone and a technique that never drew attention to itself. The relationship was like that of father and son, and one can appreciate Dubois’s sacrifice in lending Enescu his prize pupil for a year in 1938. Grumiaux was equally gifted as a

pianist, and it was the rapport with Dubois that pushed him towards the violin. Yet he never lost his facility on the piano and recorded Brahms’s Op 100 and Mozart’s K481 violin sonatas for Philips, playing both parts.

The German occupation, just when Grumiaux’s career was taking off, was deeply formative. Sent to a labour camp in France, he was rescued by his musical reputation. Cellist Robert Maas, marooned in Belgium (his Pro Arte Quartet colleagues were in America), formed the Artis Quartet with Dubois, with Grumiaux playing second violin and Robert

Courte the viola. Refusing to perform for the Germans, they gave private recitals, including a Beethoven cycle for the Société Philharmonique de Bruxelles.

Grumiaux spent the latter part of the war in hiding but was then snapped up by Walter Legge, and London was his first international port of call. He wed Australian violinist Amanda Webb, and with Clara Haskil he established an artistic union which ended tragically after seven years. ‘Since [Haskil’s] death in 1960, I have not found anyone to replace her,’ he lamented. He did, however, fall in with some terrific Hungarian musicians, notably husband and wife Georges Janzer (viola player in the Végh Quartet) and Eva Czako (cellist), with whom he formed his Grumiaux Trio.

Grumiaux made a few discs for Columbia and Boston,

His unaccompanied Bach is a perfect fusion of subtle rhythm, cantilena, sonority, assertiveness and humility

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1926 – *An early start*

In May 1926 enters Charleroi Conservatoire. First concerts, aged five, at Palace cinema, Fleurus, October 30 and 31, November 1.

• 1932 – *From Charleroi to Brussels*

Plays Kreutzer Violin Concerto No 19 and Beethoven *Pathétique* Sonata in a concert in the city of Charleroi. Graduates from Charleroi Conservatoire with honours in violin, piano, solfège, score reading and transposition. Enters Brussels Conservatoire.

• 1936 – *Graduates from Brussels Conservatoire*

Awarded prizes in chamber music (Maurice Dambois), violin (Alfred Dubois), harmony (Fernand Quinet). Dubois remains his mentor and in 1938 sends him to George Enescu in Paris.

• 1945 – *British tour and first recordings*

Walton Concerto at Proms cancelled; first BBC broadcast; first recordings – for Columbia. Inherits deceased Dubois’s class in 1949; marries in 1951; tours America 1951–52.

• 1953 – *Clara Haskil association begins*


Plays Beethoven Op 96 with Clara Haskil at Prades on June 21 (start of a duo ended by her death from a fall at Brussels train station in 1960). First modern performances of Paganini’s Concerto No 4 in 1954.

• 1973 – *Made a baron by King Baudouin of Belgium*

Dies of stroke in early hours of October 16, 1986 at home in Ukkel, near Brussels, nine days after last concert (Mozart G major and Bruch G minor concertos in Brussels).



but the liaison with Philips from 1953 sealed his love affair with collectors. He was the first after Adolf Busch to play all five Mozart concertos and the first to record the cycle (in mono, and again in stereo along with the *Sinfonia concertante*). At his best with a strong partner, he set down memorable Beethoven and Brahms concertos with Eduard van Beinum, and wonderful Mozart and Beethoven sonatas with Haskil. Deeply proud of his heritage, he shone in Vieuxtemps, Franck, Ysaÿe, Lekeu. He thrived on Baroque music – Corelli, Leclair, Vivaldi, Veracini, Telemann, Handel. His unaccompanied Bach is a perfect fusion of subtle rhythm, cantilena, sonority, assertiveness and humility. His Berg and Stravinsky concertos are superb. I love his Chausson *Poème*, Viotti Violin Concerto in A minor and Saint-Saëns No 3 in B minor.

Those who agree that the Trio Italiano d'Archi surpassed the Grumiaux Trio in Mozart and Beethoven will find the Belgian–Hungarian group better represented by a 1966 Schwetzingen Festival recital (Hänssler Classic CD93 727). Similarly, the trio's studio recordings of the Mozart quintets, with violinist Arpad Gérecz and viola player Max Lesueur, could do with a soupçon more muscle. But at his best, Arthur Grumiaux illuminated what he played – and, by extension, illuminates our lives. 

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Bach Complete Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin
Grumiaux v7
Decca (3/62)

Recorded in Berlin between November 1960 and March 1961, Grumiaux's performances of the Sonatas and Partitas were instantly recognised as benchmarks for interpretations on a violin with modern set-up. The Gavotte en Rondeaux from the Partita in E was track 14 on the first of the two Golden Records carried on both 1977 Voyager spacecraft as samples of Earth's culture.

Instrumental



David Fanning admires a debut recording from Dmitry Shishkin:

'In the Scriabin, his exquisite shaping and layering of textures makes for an unusually private experience' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 56](#)



Jed Distler is impressed by a varied recital from a conductor-pianist:

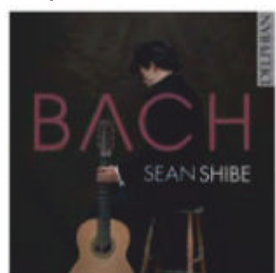
'Zorn's knack for "orchestrating" at the piano serves Villa-Lobos's wild and discombobulated textures well' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 58](#)

JS Bach

Lute Suite, BWV996. Partita, BWV997.
Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, BWV998

Sean Shibe *gtr*

Delphian © DCD34233 (46' • DDD)



Can you ever speak in elevated, grandiose terms about a classical guitarist? You want

to avoid weight, to find instead phrases of lightness and simplicity. Yet after listening to Sean Shibe's magnificent new Bach recital, when I reach for comparisons I don't go to other guitarists. Or even lutenists. I go to a musician like the violinist Rachel Podger, or the pianist Angela Hewitt. Because, as with Shibe, and to paraphrase Schweitzer, their Bach so clearly sounds like it must be a summation of everything that has gone before. Except of course we're talking about their own musical knowledge and experience. Not the music of those hapless composers unlucky enough to exist solely to make a Bach possible. So, ideally, you ought to listen first to Shibe's previous two recordings to get the most out of this one.

On the Bream-ful 'Dreams and Fancies' (9/17), he miraculously unifies the disparate humours of Dowland, Britten, Walton and Arnold. On 'softLOUD' (A/18), he invites us to an electroacoustic house party for strange bedfellows Anon, James MacMillan, Steve Reich, Julia Wolfe and David Lang. On the present recording, Shibe applies the musical and interpretative qualities that characterise its predecessors – energy, reflection, eclecticism, integration and emotional candour – to remind us that Bach might have been singular but he contained multitudes. Including those not yet born.

The flow of the E minor Suite's Prelude is subtly arrested by expressively arpeggiated chords which throw into sharp relief a cut-glass Fugue that attunes the listener to rippling yet clearly defined

semiquavers and tastefully applied ornamentation in the following dance movements. I like, too, the pointing up of the similarities between the BWV997 Partita's Fugue and the previous Suite's Gigue, while the intelligent use of sweetness of tone and rubato, as in the exquisite Sarabande's third bar, is very fine. And has the *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro* ever sounded so contemporary in its nostalgic sweetness and, in the final movement, sheer unabashed joy?

Somewhat perversely, I'm reminded of that formidable doyenne of the harpsichord Wanda Landowska saying to cellist Pablo Casals: 'You play Bach your way and I'll play Bach his way.' In reality, like Shibe, they both played Bach both ways. And with conviction. And love. **William Yeoman**

JS Bach

Keyboard Toccatas, BWV910-916

Masaaki Suzuki *hpd*

BIS © BIS2221 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Bach's Toccatas seem to present their interpreters thorny issues. With no

surviving manuscripts from Bach himself, and with the number of sources for the individual pieces ranging from two to 23, interpreters are faced with what must seem an overabundance of choices. Fortunately none of this confusing *mise en scène* is apparent in the bracingly forthright, life-affirming performances of Masaaki Suzuki on his new SACD from BIS. His instrument is a replica of an enlarged Ruckers harpsichord built in 1982 by Willem Kroesbergen of Utrecht.

The jaunty D major Toccata, BWV912, is here filled with irrepressible high spirits that seem perfectly tailored to each musical gesture. The *Adagio* searchingly finds its way, suggesting an on-the-spot improvisation. Arrival at the fugue taps into joy so infectious, so inevitable, dancing is the only option.

The largest of the Toccatas, the D minor, BWV913, presents another topography of affects – serious, inward, questing, yearning for resolution. Here the fugue is not the goal but a signpost on a longer journey. When the rigours encountered there don't provide closure, Suzuki launches into an *Adagio* so poignant that it seems a contemplation of the human condition. Nor does the final *Allegro* provide an apotheosis. Rather we experience a summation of the various processes that the young Bach envisioned to achieve, finally, an end. But an end to what? Suffering? Grief? Anger? Loss? It is to Suzuki's great credit as a musician that he can leave us wondering.

Delivering interpretations at once so thoughtful and thought-provoking, all within an aura of spontaneous delight, can only reflect years of the most intimate contact with this music. That Suzuki shares that experience with us unimpeded, along with his seasoned view of Bach's great humanity, is a gift of no small value.

Patrick Rucker

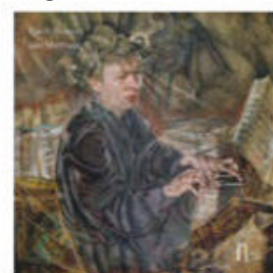
JS Bach/Busoni • Busoni

JS Bach/Busoni Chaconne (from Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004). Ten Chorale Preludes

Busoni Fantasia contrappuntistica

Jan Michiels *pf*

Fuga Libera © FUG760 (70' • DDD)



Jan Michiels previously recorded four of Busoni's Bach chorale prelude

transcriptions and Busoni's *Fantasia contrappuntistica* for a 2010 release on the Etcetera label. These remakes mainly differ in regard to Fuga Libera's more resonant and diffuse acoustic, along with Michiels's use of two different instruments: an 1860 Bechstein in the 10 chorale preludes and the Chris Maene Straight Strung Steinway Grand for the programme's remainder.

Michiels still hammers out *In dir ist Freude's* melody to ugly percussive effect,



Bach with love: Sean Shibe blends youth and experience in Bach-playing that transcends his own specific instrument

and bogs *Nun freut euch*'s swirling passagework down to the point where the tempo grows progressively slower, in contrast to Víkingur Ólafsson's dazzlingly winged interpretation (DG, 11/18). For once *Wachet auf* transpires at a real *alla breve* tempo, yet why the superfluous and predictable ritards at phrase ends? *Ich ruf zu dir* and *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland* clock in faster than many versions, yet actually sound much slower on account of Michiels's choppy phrasing.

On the other hand, the *Fantasia contrappuntistica*'s extensive tremolos gain appreciable mystery and colouristic variety, and the thick polyphonic climaxes never lapse into pounding or lose definition. Although one might miss the gathering energy that Egon Petri, Wolf Harden and Christopher O'Reilly generate in the second fugue, Michiels's pliable bass lines convey a sense of air in between the notes, while the high-register writing truly evokes Busoni's *quasi flauto* directive.

Favouring headlong tempos, Michiels channels his reserves of virtuosity towards architectural continuity throughout the Bach/Busoni Chaconne, while providing more flexible contrast in the major-key episodes. This strong performance constitutes Michiels's most cohesive,

fluent and satisfying playing over the course of an uneven release. **Jed Distler**

Franck

'Préludes, Fugues & Chorals'

Choral No 2 (transcr Lugansky). Prélude, aria et final. Prélude, choral et fugue. Prélude, fugue et variation, Op 18 (transcr Bauer)

Nikolai Lugansky *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2642 (67' • DDD)



Usually a disc of César Franck's piano music – especially one that includes the *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue* – would have me reaching for the tissues. As soon as those *cri de coeur* chords chime in early in the Prelude, there's no saving me. But with Lugansky's disc the main use I would find for the tissue would be to try and remove some of the dust from the matt, lustreless piano sound. The instrument itself is surely largely to blame, and the recording does nothing to supply the missing bloom or warmth. But still, you would think a pianist of Lugansky's intuition and imagination – as his outstanding recent Debussy disc perfectly demonstrated – would still

smuggle in some magic and let some poetry shine through. Not a bit of it. On this occasion he seems never fully engaged temperamentally. Arriving at the Chorale, he sounds completely indifferent to the bell-like thematic top line: hear him alongside Stephen Hough if you are in any doubt. And if you find your mind wandering during Lugansky's fugue, that's certainly not your fault; Hough here finds a rainbow of timbres, building each episode towards a monumental cathedral of sound.

Is it, I wonder, that Lugansky was fearful of self-indulgence, to the point where he merely sounds self-denying? With the *Prelude, Aria and Finale* the impression given is of a fine pianist reading from the score, not having reached the stage of any inner vision for the piece, while the best that can be said of the *Prelude, Fugue and Variation* (in Harold Bauer's transcription of the organ original) is that it resists sentimentality. Nor does Lugansky's own transcription of the second organ Chorale do much to justify the change of medium. A serious disappointment all round, I fear.

Michelle Assay

Prélude, aria et final, Prélude, choral et fugue –

selected comparison:

Hough (4/97) (HYPE) CDA66918

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Janáček

In the Mists. On an Overgrown Path.

Sonata 1.X.1905, 'From the Street'

Thomas Adès *pf*

Signum © SIGCD600 (67' • DDD)



One could spend time discussing why a composer of Thomas Adès's prominence is compelled to record Janáček's piano music, but that's a job for pundits, not reviewers. It's apparent from the get-go that Adès is determined to check all expressive clichés at the recording studio door, accept Janáček's plain-spoken syntax and lack of artifice for what they are, and simply play the music straight. No gratuitous taperings, emphatic accents or ritards where the composer indicates none.

The very first piece in *On an Overgrown Path* says it all: compare András Schiff's artful tonal shadings or Jan Bartoš's brooding between the lines to Adès's direct, straightforward approach. Because he takes Janáček's directives on faith, the sudden *sforzando* staccatos gain intensity and surprise. And by not overplaying 'Come with us' as if it were extroverted Schumann, the subtle harmonic quirks truly read, as do the differences between *piano* and *pianissimo*. In Book 1's final movement, Adès pays more attention to dynamics and rests than most pianists, and does not prettify the chorale-like sections with mellifluous voicing.

Adès seems less interested in colour or moody subtext than rendering text with intensive clarity in the two-movement Sonata. Notice, for example, how the pianist gives prominence to the first movement's repeated-note counterline, possibly to a fault. His gaunt sonority hits hard in the second movement's climax where listeners might expect more ample resonance. Again, Adès's attention to dynamics reinforces the unsettled lyricism throughout the opening *Andante* of *In the Mists*, although he doesn't quite commit to Janáček's *cantando* and *dolcissimo* requests. On the other hand, he deftly plays up the contrasts between the second movement's initial 'fragmented ragtime' theme and *presto* flourishes. The *Andantino*'s quasi-nursery rhyme character benefits from Adès's variations in touch and articulation, as do the finale's jaggedly declamatory writing. You can say that Adès's Janáček emphasises truth over beauty, whereas Bartoš, Schiff and Firkušný find a happy medium between the two. An illuminating release. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Firkušný (6/72^R) (DG) 449 764-2GOR

Schiff (7/01) (ECM) 461 660-2

Bartoš (9/19) (SUPR) SU4266-2

Liszt

'Light & Darkness'

Liszt Ballade No 2, S171. Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S173 – No 3, Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude; No 8, Miserere. Deux Légendes, S175. La marche pour le Sultan Abdul-Medjid Khan, S403. Réminiscences de Lucia de Lammermoor, S397 **Pärt Für Alina**

Martina Filjak *pf*

Profil © PH18074 (77' • DDD)



Martina Filjak is a Croatian pianist (b1978) who first came to public

attention when she won the Gold Medal at the 2009 Cleveland International Piano Competition.

For a dark and sombre start to a piano recital one could hardly do better than the 'Miserere d'après Palestrina'. The sepulchral mood is shattered at the 2'16" mark with a sustained assault which, in Martina Filjak's hands, leaves the piano huddling in the corner, curled up and pleading for mercy. The same effect is felt halfway through the Ballade, where the right hand thunders out the theme against chromatic rumbles in the bass.

Part of the problem is the very close microphone placement. The piano, a first-class Steinway Model D, is rather in-your-face, yet the pedal action is also clearly audible in any passages played *p* and softer. Filjak has an innate empathy for Liszt's music and the technique and physical strength to convey its drama but not, I fear, the most pleasant of tone production. Her *fff* climaxes are harsh and penetrating. Try the passage in 'St François de Paule marchant sur les flots' when the main theme returns (*allegro maestoso ed animato*). The same goes for the climax of 'Bénédiction de Dieu', though long before that I am afraid Filjak left me wanting to jump to the next track, having taken 8 minutes and 34 seconds to arrive at the *Andante* (second section) of this masterpiece. The far more refined Marc-André Hamelin (Hyperion, 5/11), for example, arrives at the same point almost exactly two minutes before her; and the way he handles the prayerful closing pages is as fluent as Filjak is laboured.

Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor fares rather better, though the left hand's ascending accompaniment in the opening

pages should surely be kept in a separate dynamic to the melody. Jorge Bolet (Ensayo, 6/74) is the benchmark here. This leaves only the rarity of another Donizetti-Liszt transcription: *Grande Paraphrase de la marche de Giuseppe Donizetti composée pour Sa Majesté le Sultan Abdul Medjid-Khan*, to give it its full title, a noisy and particularly vapid effusion written in 1847 when Donizetti himself invited Liszt to visit the Ottoman court. Martina Filjak ends her programme with Arvo Pärt's brief, hushed *Für Alina* as an anachronistic encore. **Jeremy Nicholas**

P Scharwenka

'Piano Music, Vol 1'

Für die Jugend, Op 71. Romantische Episoden, Op 65. Sechs Tonbilder in kleinen Rahmen, Op 69

Luís Pipa *pf*

Toccata Classics © TOCC0521 (65' • DDD)



You have to hand it to Martin Anderson and his endlessly enterprising Toccata

Classics label. Hardly a month passes without a new release of music by someone you've never heard of, or of unfamiliar works by a more well-known composer. The 20th century is particularly well served but Anderson's omnivorous gaze encompasses the likes of Ernst, Gernsheim, Boëly, Conus – and Philipp Scharwenka (1847-1917). He is the elder brother of the deservedly far better-known Xaver, whose *Polish Dance* No 1 was once ubiquitous and whose magnificent First and Fourth Piano Concertos are *primus inter pares* of their genre.

Your reviewer's only previous experience of Philippe Scharwenka's music was his Violin Sonata in B minor on an old Genesis LP. It did not, I'm afraid, make much of an impression. And the same is true of his five *Romantische Episoden* (published in 1887) that open this first volume of his piano music. Described not inaccurately on the CD as sitting 'somewhere between Chopin and Brahms, with echoes of Schubert and Schumann', Scharwenka fatally lacks the gift of melody that make the works of his four peers immortal. After two hearings, only the tarantella-like No 4 *Kräftig und feurig* ('strong and fiery') captured my attention, and not only because of the more interesting subject matter: the piano produced a less than attractive tone above *forte* on this particular track. (I note that this Op 65 was recorded in Portugal in 2002; the rest of the disc, made in the same concert hall, not until 16 years later).

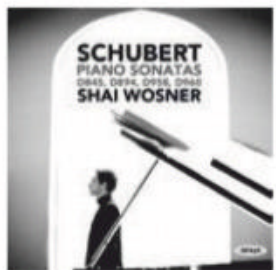
With *Sechs Tonbilder in kleinen Rahmen* ('Sound pictures in small frames' – a charming title) and a better piano, one's affection for Philipp's music grows. These are thematically attractive, technically undemanding little pieces for children with descriptive titles ('Widmung', 'Polnisch' and the like) that might sit comfortably alongside the collections by Schumann and Tchaikovsky. *Für die Jugend* follows in a similar though less memorable vein. The Portuguese pianist Luís Pipa is an effective advocate in these performances, all of which are first recordings and which I should guess are read from the music desk; but on this evidence I would suggest that Philipp Scharwenka needs cherry-picking, not a complete harvest. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 6, D845; No 18, D894; No 19, D958; No 21, D960

Shai Wosner *pf*

Onyx ® ② ONYX4217 (148' • DDD)



Of Shai Wosner's 13 or so CDs, if my calculations are correct, four are solo

recordings, and three of those are built around Schubert. He has devoted entire recitals to the Viennese master and plays the four-hand works on tour with his regular keyboard partner, Orion Weiss. Wosner's latest Onyx release includes two of the final trio of sonatas (the C minor, D958, and the B flat, D960; he recorded the A major Sonata, D959, in 2014 – 1/15) plus two other sonatas from 1825 and 1826: the A minor, D845, and the G major, D894.

First it must be said that Wosner certainly has a way with Schubert's scherzos. All four of them here (though Schubert labels the third movements of both the G major and C minor Sonatas 'Menuetto') are light, beautifully articulated and fleet as the wind. They are filled with that almost indescribable *echt*-Austrian folk *naïveté* on which so much of their charm relies. At the same time, they are straightforward, avoiding the excesses that Brendel takes Schnabel to task for. Savour, for instance, the exquisite *ppp* lilt in the Trio of the G major Sonata's Menuetto.

In fact, it may be that the G major Sonata, in its freshness and originality, is the highlight of the entire recording. Few pianists are able to pull off the largely static opening of the first movement:

an abundance of quiet caution seems to paralyse them. But in Wosner's delicate reading, with its perfectly calculated rhythmic impulse, it's as though we imbibe the same crisp alpine air that permeates the great D major Sonata, D850. Most refreshing, perhaps, is the complete absence of any hint of cloying sentimentality. Similar nuanced simplicity allows Wosner to negotiate between the polar opposite characters of the *Andante*.

Evocation of immense space is a factor in the success of this B flat Sonata as well, space being the operative here in lieu of monumentality. The opening movement's noble theme flows with heart-gripping earnestness, unmarred by the less than convincing dry, abrupt termination of the bass trill. Clipped staccatos likewise pose only minor distractions to the persuasiveness of the movement's unfolding discourse. Great depth and unaffected poignancy characterise the *Andante sostenuto*, with beautifully voiced harmonic support. The finale provides ample catharsis, employing only the subtlest of means.

Though it seems ungracious to voice reservations in the face of such strong, original conceptions beautifully realised, I have lingering doubts about the two minor-key sonatas. Despite the poised and expressive slow movements of both works, the outer movements seem to present realms of heroism in the face of tragedy, rage at fate and qualities of sheer desperation that Wosner is yet reluctant to fully inhabit. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, this release can only underscore Wosner's fully justified reputation as one of the more remarkable Schubert pianists of our day. **Patrick Rucker**

Swayne

Stations of the Cross

Simon Niemiński *org*

Resonus ® RES10118 (60' • DDD)

Played on the organ of St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral, Edinburgh



For many organists the name of Giles Swayne became associated with their instrument with his *Riff-Raff* of 1983, which set out to bridge what the composer described as the 'gulf between classical music and its popular roots'. The massive *Stations of the Cross*, composed a little over 20 years later, is a very different cup of tea, making no concessions in either its scope or its musical language to anything in a

recognisably 'popular' vein. The scope of the work is dark, dramatic and emotionally intense and the musical language uncompromisingly dissonant.

From the dark, deep rumblings of the opening station ('Jesus is sentenced to death'), through the almost inaudible agony of 'The third fall' and the vicious, swiping clusters of 'Jesus is stripped of his clothes', to the palpitations and desolation of the final station ('Jesus' body is laid in the tomb'), Swayne's visionary writing is imbued with a level of powerful dramatic imagery that requires a highly resourceful organ and a particularly inspiring player to bring it off to its full effect.

It gets both here. The 2007 Matthew Copley organ of St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral in Edinburgh speaks in a disarmingly direct way with a sharp clarity that can seem uncomfortably harsh but certainly captures the work's 'immediacy and humanity', which Nigel Simeone refers to in his extensive booklet essay. For his part, Simon Niemiński champions this vast score with a compelling intensity that captures the visionary scope of Swayne's writing magnificently. This is neither a work nor a performance for the faint-hearted; but for those willing to give themselves up to this strangely powerful music, there is much to savour.

Marc Rochester

Dmitry Shishkin

Medtner Canzona serenata, Op 38 No 6.

Forgotten Melodies, Set 3, Op 40 – No 1, Danza col canto; No 2, Danza sinfonica **Rachmaninov** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 36 **Scriabin** Piano Sonata No 2, 'Sonata-fantasy', Op 19 **Tchaikovsky** Scherzo à la russe, Op 1 No 1

Dmitry Shishkin *pf*

La Dolce Volta ® LDV223D (57' • DDD)



With its relatively short duration, five-language notes, moody photographs

and generous space allotted to sponsors (Breguet Watches of Switzerland, who also support the Geneva competition), a feeling of luxury attends this issue. For some reason it comes to the UK only as a digital-only album. Yet the playing itself is of a very high order, as befits a Geneva first prize and Tchaikovsky Silver Medal winner.

The 27-year-old Russian has a rare feeling for the gentle wistfulness of Medtner's 'Canzona serenata' and 'Danza col canto', and he is no less at home in the more Schumannesque



Personal conceptions: Shai Wosner brings poise, imagination and a crucial sense of space to some of Schubert's greatest piano sonatas

solidity of the 'Danza sinfonica'. But it is above all the Scriabin *Sonata-fantasy* that reveals his credentials as a poet-pianist. His exquisite shaping and layering of textures makes for an unusually private experience of the first movement, and the sheer *Fingerfertigkeit* he brings to the *Presto* finale is a thing of wonder. I have always thought of this as one of the less than fully assured of Scriabin's sonatas but Shishkin has challenged that perception, making me want to sit down and learn it properly.

He brings a similarly cultured approach to the Rachmaninov Second Sonata. Disdaining temptations to let the *fortissimos* detonate and the *pianissimos* languish, he presents it as a thoroughly musical, integrated whole. True, the agogic hesitations that accompany this approach detract somewhat from the thrust and thrill normally associated with the piece, and there were times when I felt a lack of the last ounce of sheer power and grandeur – maybe a symptom of not enough body weight behind the sound?

I would like to hear Shishkin live before being too confident in that last

verdict. The sound quality here is fine, but with a slight tendency to thinness in *piano* and glassiness in *forte* (the high points in the Tchaikovsky Scherzo feel just a little tight). Not that this will discourage me from returning to his Medtner and Scriabin for inspiration.

David Fanning

'The Diabelli Project'

Beethoven Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli, Op 120 **Diabelli Waltz**

Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli by

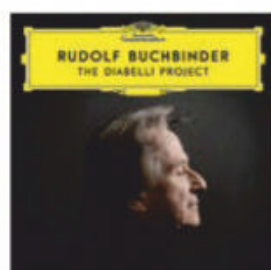
Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kreutzer, Liszt, Moscheles, FXW Mozart, Schubert and Czerny

New Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli by

Auerbach, Dean, Hosokawa, Jost, Lubman, Manoury, M Richter, Shchedrin, Staud, Tan Dun and Widmann

Rudolf Buchbinder *pf*

DG ® ② 483 7707GH2 (96' • DDD)



Anton Diabelli, the pianist, composer, and publisher from near Salzburg,

brought out Beethoven's Op 120 in 1823 and the following year included it as the first of a two-volume set, *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein* ('Patriotic Artists Association'), with the second volume devoted to variations by 50 other composers. The simple waltz that Diabelli supplied for the project, intended to benefit widows and orphans of the Napoleonic Wars, has inspired appreciation from writers like Bülow, Tovey and Maynard Solomon, and scorn from others, such as William Kinderman. Interpreters seem to fall into similar camps. Some, Artur Schnabel for instance, present the waltz as integral to a magnificent artwork, interpreting it as a charming prologue. Others, such as Rudolf Buchbinder, perhaps motivated to highlight the significance of Beethoven's variations above its tawdry source, treat it as beneath contempt, the sooner out of the way, the better.

Throughout his long career, Rudolf Buchbinder, who is now 73, has been identified with the music of Beethoven and Mozart. His book, *Mein Beethoven: Leben mit dem Meister* ('My Beethoven:

INSTRUMENTAL REVIEWS

Life with the Master’) appeared in 2014. Warner Classics is reissuing his complete Beethoven piano music, recorded between 1973 and 1981, as well as an individual reissue of his *Diabelli* Variations (10/73), including the other 50 variations commissioned by Diabelli. Nearly simultaneously, his debut on the DG label, ‘The Diabelli Project’, includes a new recording of Beethoven’s Op 120 and a smattering of the other composers who responded to Diabelli, along with 11 variations from contemporary composers.

Unfortunately, Buchbinder’s brusque treatment of the theme doesn’t end there. Minimal contrasts between *piano* and *forte* signal the general paucity of contrast throughout the performance. Slavish adherence to an unyielding beat, evident as early as Var 2, adds a layer of stiffness, mitigating expressivity. Arriving at Vars 6 and 7, one begins to yearn for some small variety of touch or dynamic, some vague indication that might suggest differentiation of character. Vars 11 and 12 do offer a spell of quiet legato but their non-committal blandness soon strikes as aimlessly pedestrian. The insensate note-ness of the two adjacent semiquaver variations, No 16 and 17, threatens to become mind-numbing. Failure to distinguish between *piano* and *pianissimo* reduces the ‘Notte e giorno fatigar’ variation, No 22, to a mechanical clock. It’s pointless to attempt characterisation of the remaining 11 variations, which make their variously leaden, humourless and constrained progress towards the concluding *Tempo di minuetto* without much sense of purpose and devoid of joy.

The individual variations, specially commissioned from contemporary composers and played here en suite, share an aroma of freshness due to their unfamiliarity. They also elicit from Buchbinder a richer and more varied palette than he uses in Beethoven. Lera Auerbach’s contribution, *Diabellical Waltz*, is the longest and, perhaps not surprisingly, the ghost of the symphonic Prokofiev seems to lurk in the background. Toshio Hosokawa constructs his *Verlust* using pianistic gestures that might have been familiar to Beethoven. Characteristically, Max Richter is able to create a compelling mood with the barest of means. Rodion Shchedrin’s variation is the wittiest of the lot and one of the more pianistically imaginative.

Patrick Rucker

‘Landscapes’

JS Bach/Busoni Ich ruf zu dir Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639 **Janáček** Sonata 1.X.1905, ‘From the Street’ **Messiaen** Catalogue d’oiseaux – Le merle bleu **Odeh-Tamimi** Skiá (Shadow) **Villa-Lobos** Rudepoêma

Yuval Zorn *pf*

Rubicon Ⓜ RCD1052 (64’ • DDD)



It’s not enough for Yuval Zorn to be one of today’s most distinctive symphonic

and opera conductors; he’s also a fabulous pianist blessed with a natural technique and big, colourful sound. Indeed, Zorn’s debut solo CD stands out for ample and realistic engineering that conveys how the piano vividly projects across the footlights in the Banff Centre’s splendid acoustic.

Perhaps Zorn’s long experience in front of orchestras informs his intelligent parsing of the massed chords and decorative flourishes throughout Messiaen’s ‘Le merle bleu’, where the pianist’s gradations of touch and astute timing clarify the composer’s foreground and background strata. In the opening movement of Janáček’s Sonata, the top melodic line and inner voices assume independent characters, as if they were emanating from two different pianos, while Zorn gives uncommonly specific shape to the rolling bass figurations. Many pianists take the second movement’s death subtext as a cue for wan and morose interpretations but Zorn will have none of that; he manages to fuse bleakness and soaring lyricism, foreshadowing the mature style manifested in the composer’s later operas. Again, Zorn’s knack for ‘orchestrating’ at the piano serves the wild and discombobulated textural thickets throughout Villa-Lobos’s *Rudepoêma* well, even though picky listeners might prefer Marc-André Hamelin’s ever-so-slightly cleaner left-hand leaps and more incisively transparent climaxes (Hyperion, 10/00).

I don’t quite share Zorn’s enthusiasm for Sami Odeh-Tamimi’s *Skiá*, an essentially percussive exercise in clusters and tremolos that goes on too long for what it has to express. Still, Zorn’s precision and careful attention to dynamics make the best case for this music. He concludes his recital with an unusually brisk reading of the Bach/Busoni *Ich ruf zu dir* chorale prelude that teems with originality and arresting detail. An impressive release on all counts, and highly recommended. **Jed Distler**

‘The Long 17th Century’



‘A Cornucopia of Early Keyboard Music’

Bruna XI Tiento de falsas de 6° tono **Bull** Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la I **Buxtehude** Variations on ‘La Capricciosa’ **Byrd** Walsingham **Cabanilles** Pasacalles de 1° tono **Chambonnières** Pavane l’Entretien des Dieux **Coprario** A Maske **Correa Braga** Batalha de 6° tom **Correa de Arauxo** Tiento de medio registro de tiple de decimo tono **L Couperin** Duo in G minor **D’Anglebert** Tombeau de Mr de Chambonnières **Farnaby** The Old Spagnoletta **Ferrabosco** I Fantasia with G final **Frescobaldi** Toccata cromatica per l’elevatione **Froberger** Partita II **G Gabrieli** Canzon quarta a 4 **Jacquet de la Guerre** Rondeau in G minor **Kerll** Passacaglia in D **Kuhnau** Sonata quarta, ‘Hiskia agonizzante e risanato’ **Le Roux** La Favoritte **Locke** Suite III **Macedo** Ricercare a quatro de 4° tom **Merula** Capriccio cromatico **Muffat** Partita IV **Pasquini** Toccata con lo scherzo del cuccó **Philips** Pavan in G **Picchi** Toccata **M Praetorius** Zwei Variationen: Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren **Radino** Galliarda seconda **Scheidemann** Galliarda in D minor **Schildt** Paduana lagrima (after Dowland) **Sweelinck** Mein junges Leben hat ein End **Tisdale** Almand **Tomkins** A Sad Pavan for These Distracted Times **Trabaci** Gagliarda seconda, ottava **Weckmann** Canzon III

Daniel-Ben Pienaar *pf*

Avie Ⓜ ② AV2415 (156’ • DDD)



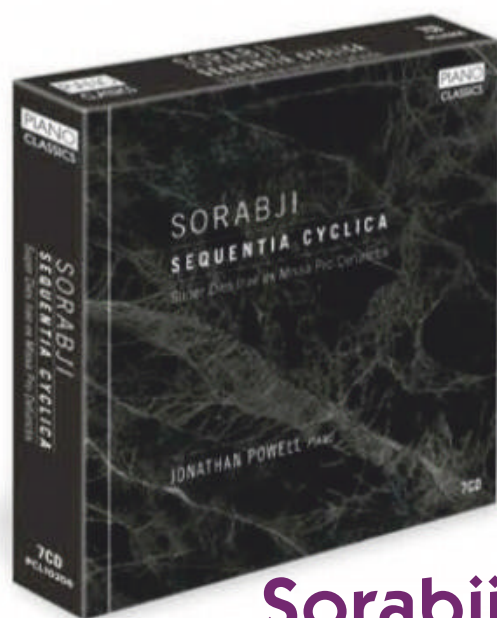
Clearly not one to do things by halves, Daniel-Ben Pienaar – whose releases

already include the complete Beethoven sonatas and the Bach ‘48’ – offers here not just one disc of early keyboard music on the piano but two. That’s a total of 36 pieces, by a total of 36 composers, some of whom even harpsichordists and organists might be hard-put to identify. This is not a man dabbling in the ‘non-piano’ repertoire but one immersing himself in it and selecting with confidence.

What makes it work is not just the dazzling precision and clarity of Pienaar’s finger technique (though that is certainly a vital factor), but the intelligence that has gone into his interpretations. Pienaar is in the company of modern-day pianists who, while respecting early music, see it as raw material for the pianistic imagination – similar adventurous souls include Alexandre Tharaud, Francesco Tristano and Joanna MacGregor – but there is no doubt that he also works from a position of deep knowledge of the music’s original circumstances. Busoni once said that any



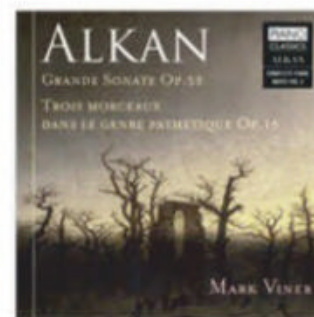
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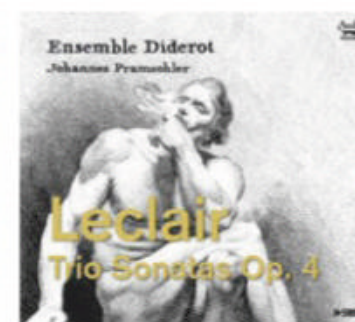
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GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

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'The English Organ'

Three feature-length documentaries by Will Fraser, plus more than 10 hours of repertoire from Byrd to the present on 33 organs

Daniel Moulton *orgs*

Fugue State Films    +  

FSFDVD012

(17h • DDD • NTSC • 5.1/stereo • 0)



North German organs of the late 17th/early 18th centuries and French organs of the late 19th/early 20th centuries, along with the music written for them, have been so dominant that it has been easy to overlook other national schools of organ building. Few of these has been so undervalued and maligned as the English organ, which may have largely been driven by the unique choral demands of the English church but nevertheless spawned a vast repertoire from English organist-composers.

Fugue State Films has turned its lenses and microphones to the English organ with this set of four DVDs and three audio CDs. The first of the DVDs includes three documentary films of 70 minutes each, tracing the development of the English organ from 'The Long Beginning' through 'The Victorian Boom' to 'Modernity and Nostalgia'. The remaining three DVDs present stop-by-stop tours of each of the 33 instruments featured in the documentary as well as filmed performances of appropriate repertoire. Three audio CDs present further repertoire which has possibly less visual impact – Thalben-Ball's *Variations on a Theme by Paganini for Pedals* would not seem quite so sensational if you could not see the organist's feet darting about the pedalboard of Dundee's Caird Hall. Organ registrations are given in full in a lavishly illustrated booklet.

Guiding us through the convoluted history of the English Organ is Daniel Moulton, who does so with all the eagerness of a true enthusiast. You

somehow know that after all his clambering around the insides of organs, his joyous talk of wind pressures, pipe scalings, wind trunking and ratcheted swell pedals, a steam train is going to appear somewhere; and so it does (buried deep in the third documentary). However, Moulton is no mere enthusiast, but someone with an obvious passion for the subject, and he draws us into the saga of the English organ through his own manifest fascination with it. He calls on a handful of experts to add colour to his commentary: the historian Paul Binski provides a touch of sobriety, putting social context to organ developments, Nicholas Thistlethwaite's elegant eloquence explains the evolving fashions which have shaped organ design since the 17th century, and Bruce Buchanan oozes old-school mischievousness as he recalls the heady days of the Henry Willis company, roundly dismissing the subsequent 'stewards' of the firm, deliciously noting, with reference to Henry Willis III, that 'it was against his principles to agree with

anyone'. The image of Buchanan standing alone in an empty St George's Hall, Liverpool, staring admiringly at the organ as it thunders out WT Best's transcription of *The War March of the Priests* is just one of many unforgettable visual images in this series of superbly edited films.

There is a pleasing coherence to the overall narrative, opening (to the accompaniment of pastoral birdsong) at what the film claims to be the oldest surviving English organ case, dating back to the mid-16th century and housed in the church at Old Radnor in Wales. The films go on to trace the development of the organ through various key figures in the world of English organ building. We hear of how the English organ remained virtually isolated from foreign influence until William Hill began to introduce German and Dutch elements, and Gray & Davidson brought in something more French. The much-maligned Hope-Jones is revealed as having had an enduring influence despite the fact that those whom he influenced 'did not give him credit'. Harrison & Harrison are described as creating 'the acme of the English organ', while Ralph Downes and the Organ Reform movement ('a cold shower after the warm bath of Romanticism') are dismissed as having a misguided understanding of continental organ sounds, one expert suggesting that Downes's knowledge of the sound of continental organs was distorted by having heard them through the tinny speaker of an old transistor radio. The documentaries end with the somewhat ambiguous message that the English organ has returned to its roots – cue a return to Old Radnor.

Moult is not just an enthusiastic guide, perhaps at his best exploring the organ stops at Holy Trinity, Walton Breck, but a highly versatile player. Every one of his performances here – ranging from William Byrd to David Matthews – is highly recommendable on its own terms. He is equally impressive as an accompanist, beautifully moulding his playing around the gorgeous sound of the Truro Cathedral choir in Stanford's A major *Magnificat*. In short, in Moult, Fugue State Films has found an ideal advocate for the English organ and has supported this one man's odyssey with a hugely impressive visual and audio package. **G**

composition is a work of transcription, and crucially Pienaar allows his awareness that much of this music may have started life away from the keyboard (as a lute solo perhaps, or a viol consort) to inform his interpretations – listen to the gorgeous way the colours swell and switch like a wind band in Gabrieli's *Canzon quarta*. He achieves all this by not being afraid to use the piano's resources of dynamic gradation, differentiation of line, quickness of response and some very discreet pedalling, coupled with his own all-encompassing varieties of colour and touch (so neatly chiselled in Weckmann's *Canzon*, so lovingly cushioned in Philips's *Pavan*) to inject the music with elements that would not have been achievable on harpsichord or organ. Thus he can dare to give Kerll's *Passacaglia* more space between the notes than one would normally expect, or emphasise the fired-off cross-rhythms in Bull's *Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* in a way no harpsichord could have managed. He shapes some impressive climaxes, too, for instance in Cabanilles's *Passacalles*.



Pienaar himself describes his approach as one of 'deliberate misreading'; but while the wide range of moods revealed can be surprising – Frescobaldi's *Toccata cromaticcha* is achingly inward and meditative; Sweelinck's *Mein junges Leben hat ein End* acquires a lyrical, almost English pastoral feel; Braga's *Batalha* leaks a Beethovenian energy – it would be hard to say that any of the music here is seriously misrepresented by what Pienaar does with it. Not only that; he also communicates an individual and convincing vision for each piece, enough for every one of them to give delight.

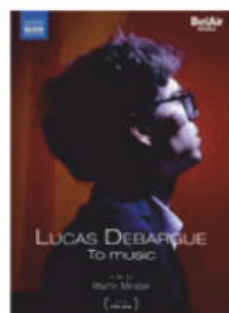
Brilliant. **Lindsay Kemp**

'To Music'

A film by **Martin Mirabel**

Lucas Debargue *pf*

Naxos  2 110639;  NBD0101V
(111' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)



Happy the young musician with a film-maker for a friend. At least if the film-maker is as talented – yet apparently blessed with spare time – as Martin Mirabel. Close up and personal, here is the Lucas Debargue I remember from spending time with him in Verbier three years ago. Mirabel had already started work on this revealing portrait, but the Alps don't figure in it.

With the two of them we criss-cross countries and continents, beginning and ending in Moscow, scene of his popular success in the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition.

Fourth place reflected the polish and most of all the formal training of his fellow competitors, but where are they now? One of them I recently saw in Sochi plying his trade in a Beethoven marathon for 'promising artists', whereas Debargue flew out of Moscow with a Sony contract in his back pocket, as well as this film in the making. Not that success has toughened him up, it seems: he likes to walk around an empty hall before a concert and visualise the audience arriving, 'about to see me fail'. This is the kind of honesty that comes from talking not to a camera but a friend.

Indeed, Debargue pays tribute to Mirabel – 'Martin made me play again' – along with his teacher, the ever-present Rena Shereshevskaya, and so candidly that it cuts through the schmalz. They first met as very young men and spent nights drinking, smoking and listening to music – and evidently still do, though now in Chicago jazz clubs instead of student digs. Debargue complains (as he did to me) about the solitary mechanics of a concerto engagement; about adjusting to the fame, the selfies, the obligation to wear a mask and play a role, the struggle to keep his performances alive and dangerous in the face of a full diary of engagements.

Then we hear him play, especially with the Castro-Balbi brothers as a piano trio, and the tetchiness melts away. More of them, and more of him making music than the slow movement of Medtner's Op 5 Sonata and a Duke Ellington improvisation, would have been welcome for those of us who value the simplicity of his touch at the keyboard as much as his questioning musical mind (try his Scarlatti, 11/19). Perhaps for want of illustration, the film skates over Debargue's difficult years, spent not at the piano but stacking supermarket shelves. In other respects, however, it spares him nothing, pursuing him even into the sanctity of the rehearsal studio, where Shereshevskaya tears a strip off his *Grande valse brillante* ('Your sustain pedal is boring. Let it go!'). Few enough young musicians of renown have the modesty to admit that they need the music more than the music needs them. Will he retain it? If Mirabel returns in a decade's time, we'll find out.

Peter Quantrill

Vyacheslav Artyomov

Guy Rickards surveys the work of the grand old man of Russian music who now turns 80

Some composers achieve celebrity gradually through their careers by dint of hard work and inspiration. Others have celebrity thrust – often unwelcomely – upon them. In the case of Vyacheslav Artyomov (b1940) it was notoriety, rather, when he – along with Edison Denisov, Elena Firsova, Sofia Gubaidulina, Alexander Knaifel, Dmitri Smirnov (who passed away last month) and Viktor Suslin – was denounced at the sixth congress of the Union of Soviet Composers in November 1979 by none other than the execrable Tikhon Khrennikov. The spur for this crackdown, which has been likened to the infamous denunciation of Prokofiev, Shostakovich and others at the first congress in 1948, seems to have been the unsanctioned participation of ‘Khrennikov’s Seven’ (as they became known) at festivals of modern Soviet music in western Europe. Their music was denigrated as ‘pointlessness ... noisy mud instead of real musical innovation’ and effectively blacklisted, with performances banned and publication blocked. Nevertheless, Artyomov was able to arrange or mount performances, and even some recordings, with the cream of Russia’s then young talent, issued eventually by Melodiya and then reissued by Olympia and most recently – in much-improved sound – by Divine Art. These include a disc of improvisations made jointly with Gubaidulina and Suslin in 1977 and 1980 under the ensemble name Astraea (variously transliterated as Astreya and Astreja), which has been reissued along with a part-electronic improvisation with trombonist Miles Anderson, made in California in 1988 and sounding like a spin-off from Pink Floyd’s studio album ‘Ummagumma’.

That ‘The Way to Olympus’ is one of the finest Russian symphonies of the past 50 years I have not the slightest doubt

Of ‘the seven’, five emigrated from Russia after perestroika, but Artyomov and Knaifel stayed, and survived. Khrennikov’s jibe that Artyomov’s music was ‘unrepresentative of the work of Soviet composers’ made it, in hindsight, even more worthy of attention for being so compellingly individual. As ever in the Soviet Union, politics lay behind the attacks (one minor side effect of the 1979 attack was the rehabilitation of the previously vilified Alfred Schnittke), and in 1988 Khrennikov, without a hint of shame or irony, declared Artyomov an ‘outstanding composer’, and his Requiem (1985-88) – which is dedicated to ‘the martyrs of long-suffering Russia’ and which had just enjoyed a hugely successful premiere in Moscow – the equal of Mozart’s and Verdi’s.

Artyomov is probably best known for his series of (to date) seven large-scale symphonies, six of which are grouped into imposing cycles: the tetralogy *Symphony of the Way* (1978-93,



rev 2002-09) and the still-in-progress trilogy *The Star of Exodus*, initiated in 1984 on the completion of his third symphony, *In memoriam* (Artyomov, like Panufnik and Vaughan Williams before him, does not overtly number his symphonies). Only his earliest symphony, *A Symphony of Elegies* (1977), stands outside these cycles, a three-quarter-hour essay in slow motion composed, curiously, the year after Górecki’s global triptych of adagios, *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*. Although also in three movements, Artyomov’s is a very different type of work – purely instrumental, its glacial tempos and micropolyphony unrelenting in their expressivity.

Its successor, the symphony *The Way to Olympus* (1978, rev 1984), could scarcely be more different, a half-hour, single-span masterpiece for full orchestra (*A Symphony of Elegies* is scored for two solo violins, chamber string ensemble and percussion sextet), packed with burgeoning energy. *The Way to Olympus* lives up to Hans Keller’s famous definition of a symphony as ‘the large-scale integration of contrasts’ and is in many respects the defining work and the climax of Artyomov’s early period, one that firmly sits in the Russian tradition of symphonic composition and yet shows the composer’s awareness of contemporary trends from beyond Russia’s borders. But alongside the Ligetian chord and note clusters, Artyomov’s long-term tonal planning is manifest, allied to an orchestral acuity reminiscent of the music of Rautavaara and Kalevi Aho, while the expressive content has an intensity not unlike that of Pettersson. That it is one of the finest Russian symphonies of the past 50 years I have not the slightest doubt.

The Way to Olympus became the first panel in Artyomov’s magnum opus *Symphony of the Way*, the further instalments

ARTYOMOV FACTS

1940 Born June 29 in Moscow

1968 Graduates from Moscow Conservatoire, where he studied with Nikolai Sidelnikov (composition) and Tovi Logovinsky (piano)

1975 With Sofia Gubaidulina and Viktor Suslin, forms radical improvisation group Astraea, giving concerts in Moscow and making several recordings

1978 Completes *The Way to Olympus*, which becomes the first panel in his symphonic tetralogy *Symphony of the Way* (completed 1993)

1979 Denounced and blacklisted as one of 'Khrennikov's Seven' at the sixth congress of the Union of Soviet Composers

1988 Completion and acclaimed premiere of his breakthrough work, the Requiem, which draws praise even from Khrennikov

1994 Works feature in the Moscow 'festival of premieres'

1997 Artyomov Festival held in Amsterdam

2009 Completes the revision of the first three panels of *The Symphony of the Way*

2014 Completes his seventh symphony, *In spe*, central panel of the trilogy *The Star of Exodus*

2016 Completes the ballet *Sola fide*, from which the Requiem originated

following fairly swiftly, completed in their original forms by 1993. *On the Threshold of a Bright World*, also in one movement, is Artyomov's fourth symphony (1990, rev 2002), a more diverse piece than its predecessors, though perhaps a little less involving.


The third panel is his fifth symphony, *Gentle Emanation* (1990-91, rev 2008), cast in three movements like *A Symphony of Elegies*, and scarcely less gripping than *The Way to Olympus*. The cycle concluded in 1993 with the sixth, *The Morning Star Arises*, the only one so far unrecorded. But in the meantime, Artyomov had begun *The Star of Exodus* with *In memoriam*. While the components of *Symphony of the Way* are full orchestral symphonies, the two works thus far completed as part of *The Star of Exodus* both involve substantial roles for solo stringed instruments: solo violin in *In memoriam*, and violin and cello in Artyomov's seventh symphony, *In spe*. Another curious common feature of these two symphonies, unlike those in *Symphony of the Way*, is that they were composed over a more protracted period of time: the roots of *In memoriam*

extend back as far as 1968, while *In spe*, begun (after a number of false starts) in 2002, was completed only in six years ago, in 2014.

The titles of Artyomov's symphonies speak of his interest in the spiritual, and many of his other works reflect this as well, from the massive Requiem – one of Artyomov's largest and most moving compositions – to his three-minute setting of the Maltese hymn *Ave crux alba* (1994, rev 2012). Between these extremes lie the at times radiant set of *Latin Hymns* for soprano, chorus and orchestra, begun in 1989 with *Ave Maria* and then set alongside *Miserere mei*, *Salve regina* and *Ave maris stella* in 2003. His non-vocal works inspired by aspects of belief range from the Christian to the non-Christian and include the percussion sextet *Totem* (1976), *Gurian Hymn* (1986) for orchestra and three solo violins, the intense and beautiful *Pietà* (1992, rev 1996) for cello, strings and tubular bells and the atmospheric *Tristia II* (1997-98, rev 2011) for piano, speaker and orchestra (which failed to impress David Fanning in his *Gramophone* review, 1/17). The Requiem originated in a project in the mid-1980s for a ballet which instead developed as a concert work. Three of its choral sections evolved into *Lamentations* (1987) for organ and

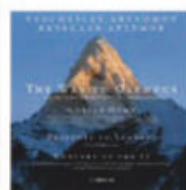
strings, while three others were eventually reworked into the originally planned ballet, *Sola fide* ('Only by Faith', 1987-2016), from which the composer has extracted five concert suites (Nos 3 and 4 have been included in Divine Art's invaluable series of new and reissued recordings). The ballet is yet to be staged.

Artyomov's reputation may rest ultimately on his orchestral music but there are a number of chamber and instrumental works running through his catalogue. These are usually for unconventional combinations of instruments, such as the bracing *Concert of the 13* (1967) for wind, percussion and piano; the neo-late romantic sextet *Star Wind* (1981) for flute, horn, glockenspiel, piano, violin and cello; and *Scenes* (1971) for clarinet, a pair of percussionists, piano, violin and double bass, composed to accompany a film of dances. The film featured the Bolshoi's principal dancer Aleksander Godunov, whose defection while on tour in the US eight years later prevented the film from being shown; however, *Scenes* survived as a charming concert suite. Many of Artyomov's early smaller-scale works feature percussion, including *Totem*, the *Sonata of Meditations* (1978) and the song-cycle *Invocations* (1979-81, later renamed *Incantations*, although it has been issued on disc under both titles).

At present, Artyomov is completing his new piano 'concerto infernale' *In the Kingdom of Nix*, after which he intends to revise his sixth symphony, *The Morning Star Arises*, and then complete *The Star of Exodus* cycle with the eighth. 

ARTYOMOV'S ART IN SOUND

Three discs revealing the range of the composer's output



Concert of the 13. Gurian Hymn. Preludes to Sonnets. The Way to Olympus

Yelena Adjemova, Tatiana Grindenko, Yevgeny Smirnov *vns*
Anton Batagov, Piotr Meschaninov *pfs* Sols of the
USSR State Academic SO / Gennady Rozhdestvensky;
Academic SO of the Moscow State Philharmonic / Dimitrij Kitajenko;
USSR State Academic SO / Timur Minbayev

Divine Art

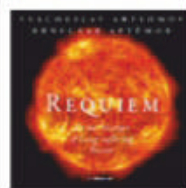
This is the perfect sampler of Artyomov's music: a vibrant chamber concerto, an orchestral hymn featuring three solo violins, a piano suite (played by Batagov) and one of his most successful and approachable symphonies.



Mattinate. Moonlight Dreams. Romantic Capriccio. Scenes. Star Wind. Variations: Nestling Antsali

Various artists
Divine Art

This beautifully balanced programme of chamber music from the 1970s and early 1980s features the composer himself at the piano (joined by Alexander Korneyev on the flute) in *Variations: Nestling Antsali* (1974), recorded in 1976.



Requiem

Yelena Brilyova, Inna Polianskaya, Lyubov Sharnina *sops*
Alexei Martynov *ten* Mikhail Lanskoï *bar* Andrei Azovsky *treb*
Oleg Yanchenko *org* Sveshnikov Boys' Chorus, Kaunas
State Chorus, Moscow Philharmonic SO / Dimitrij Kitajenko

Divine Art

This represents the seminal recording (made in 1988) of the work that began the rehabilitation of Artyomov's music in the then Soviet Russia and which remains the pivotal work of his career.

Vocal



Andrew Mellor hears Pärt, Vasks and MacMillan from Clare College:
'Arvo Pärt's Stabat mater strikes a workable deal between solemnity and event, and uses the acoustic to its advantage' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



Richard Lawrence on the pleasures of courtly music for Louis XIII:
'The predominant mood is one of delicate wistfulness: this is not a musical world of aching suspensions and chromaticism' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**

Beethoven

'Immortal Beloved'

Ah! perfido, Op 65. Cantata on the Accession of the Emperor Leopold II, WoO88 - Fliesse, Wonnezähre, fliesse!. Egmont, Op 84 - No 1, Die Trommel gerühret!; No 4, Freudvoll und leidvoll. Fidelio - O wär' ich schon mit dir vereint. Leonore Prohaska, WoO96 - No 2, Es blüht eine Blume im Garten mein. No, non turbarti, WoO92a. Primo amore, piacer del ciel, WoO92. Soll ein Schuh nicht drücken, WoO91 No 2

Chen Reiss *sop*

Academy of Ancient Music / Richard Egarr

Onyx ⑤ ONYX4218 (58' • DDD • T/t)



The programme alone whets the appetite. The Israeli soprano Chen Reiss

and Richard Egarr have concocted an offbeat selection of Beethoven arias that interleaves a smattering of familiar items with real rarities. Only the most fervent Beethoven completist is likely to know the two Italian scenas *Primo amore* and *No, non turbarti*, the latter written while Beethoven was studying Italian word-setting with Salieri; or the jaunty, Papageno-ish 'Soll ein Schuh nicht drücken', written to be performed in a Singspiel by Ignaz Umlauf; or the guileless song with harp, like an early Schubert Lied, which Beethoven composed for the play *Leonore Prohaska*. The young Beethoven can be prolix, not always idiomatic in his writing for the voice, most obviously in the two earliest works, *Primo amore* and the bravura aria with flute and cello 'Fliesse, Wonnezähre' from the 'Leopold' Cantata. Yet while the spirit of Mozart is ominipresent, these arias abound in colour, inventiveness and – not the first epithet that springs to mind with Beethoven – charm.

Abetted by eloquent solos from the (unnamed) AAM flautist and cellist, Chen Reiss sets out her stall in a confident, outgoing performance of 'Fliesse, Wonnezähre', soaring effortlessly above the stave and sporting a true trill. Here

and elsewhere, her diction, both German and Italian, can be cloudy, with insufficiently incisive consonants. I noticed this particularly in the stormy recitatives that open *Ab! perfido* and *No, non turbarti* – a far more concise and effective piece of writing than the earlier *Primo amore*.

This reservation aside, Reiss uses her bright, even-toned soprano with taste and imagination, spins a true legato line and characterises thoughtfully. If the cobbler's wife's demotic 'Soll ein Schuh' could have more of a roguish twinkle, she is delightful in Klärchen's two songs from *Egmont*, the one swaggering (with splendidly brazen sounds from the AAM), the other tenderly quizzical. The romance with harp from *Leonore Prohaska* has just the right ingenuous grace. And, diction apart, Reiss musters an apt touch of the grand manner in a dramatically intense *Ab! perfido*. There's an engaging note from Reiss herself and an informative one from Andrew Stewart, though they can't seem to agree about the identity of Beethoven's earliest 'immortal beloved' that gives this enterprising disc its title.

Richard Wigmore

Berio

Coro^a. Cries of London

Norwegian Soloists' Choir; ^aNorwegian Radio Orchestra / Grete Pedersen

BIS ⑤ BIS2391 (73' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Just what was Berio trying to achieve in the meticulous,

variegated, sensitive, texture-obsessed, micro/macro-experimental masterpiece for 40 voices and 40 instruments that is *Coro*? To get to the essence of a humane, passionate and multifaceted society is one slightly inadequate answer but the unceasing joy of this work is that there are so many more. Analysing a performance almost feels beside the

point, as long as it's a committed and accurate one.

This is that, and more. Two features stand out: first, its tendency to put a revealing slant on Berio's particular form of expressionism by keeping it all-of-a-piece – a single canvas; second, its prioritising of the composer's interest in merging instruments and voices to the point where on occasion neither is identifiable as one or the other (notably in Berio's held chords). There is a cool brightness to the textures, and presumably some added production given the size of the radio concert hall it was recorded in, but the moments of piercing light have a special radiance for all the veiled textures that surround them.

Pedersen achieves both through judicious matching of individual voices to each other and to instruments. There is little vocal grandstanding for all the excellence and expression on show (linguistically as well as musically). The performance is notable for its feeling of rolling on as if controlled by a higher force, with a sense of cumulative momentum coming to a head in the last five of the 31 linked songs.

Cries of London lets you in on the secret of how Pedersen achieved it all in the bigger piece, even though it uses only eight of her singers. This more madrigalian music sounds taut yet full of character and rooted in text, the singers as a single colonial organism as much as they were a huge community in *Coro*. Every time this excellent choir issues a new recording you wonder what will come next, but there hardly seems anywhere left after this.

Andrew Mellor

Bernstein

Mass

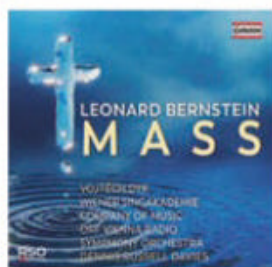
Vojtěch Dyk *bar* **Children's Choirs of the Vienna State Opera; Vienna Singakademie; Company of Music; ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies**

Capriccio ⑤ ② C5370 (112' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna, October 28, 2018



Natural communication: the baritone Simon Wallfisch and pianist Edward Rushton convey the tenderness and passion in Brahms's songs – see review on page 67



Regular readers will know that I think this to be a masterpiece – perhaps Bernstein's

most significant, certainly his most creatively virtuoso work. But it is also his most challenging stylistically and for a group of performers to inhabit its myriad musical idioms with spontaneity, confidence and aplomb is a very big ask, especially if those performers are from cultures less well versed in its very particular musical language – or, to be more accurate, languages.

We have here an American conductor – Dennis Russell Davies – whose versatility and grasp of stylistic diversity is tried and tested; but he is working with Vienna-based forces who might recognise and assume its musical multiplicity but who clearly cannot pretend that it is second nature to them. Sporadically they make a good fist of it, hitting the mark on occasions, but also too often falling wide of it.

The key to success in this piece lies with a high degree of choral and instrumental flexibility, not to say abandon. Casting is

crucial, too, both in the pivotal role of the Celebrant – taken here by Czech-born Vojtěch Dyk – and the individual and mightily challenged members of the Street Chorus, who need to 'own' the amazing 'Tropes' that pepper the musical narrative. Even the legit voices among them need to be rock stars in the best sense. And here they aren't, I'm afraid. They lack the ease and the attitude of the colloquial. In a word, they must sound 'streety'.

That wonderful grouping of solo numbers in the *Credo*, for instance, including the extraordinary 'World without end' and culminating in 'I believe in God', sound like 'impersonations' of the style, not the real thing, and the rebellious rocker of the latter just sounds hectoring as opposed to confrontational. There is also an uncomfortable sense of the solo voices being miked in a reverberant space (the Vienna Konzerthaus); and even though the engineers capture the perspectives and spatial effects well enough (though surely the tape interjections in the *Credo* should be more 'present?'), there is nonetheless, despite the punchy immediacy of percussion and electric guitars, an inescapable feeling that we are in the wrong venue for a piece that is at its heart so theatrical. Or maybe it's just

that the whole performance needs to loosen up. Russell Davies is fine, indeed searching, in the Meditations, and the omnipresent chorale has Bachian depth and nobility – but these moments are meat and bread to these performers, others less so.

Vojtěch Dyk is clearly a 'presence' as the Celebrant – he feels very 'now' – but he starts as he means to go on, adding a few too many vocal riffs and embellishments of his own to the number that is called 'Simple Song' for a reason. I was, though, touched by his childlike delivery of the Lord's Prayer setting, and 'I go on' which follows – for me the most beautiful of the Tropes – certainly comes from the heart, as does the touch of ecstasy he brings to the 'song about the writing of a song' in the *Sanctus*. His meltdown at the climax of the piece is possessed of a maniacal, almost cartoonish relish – but there are moments too of great beauty which need to be more diligently sung.

If I'm honest – and despite its technical shortcomings – no recording has ever come close to the spirit of Bernstein's own (Sony, 4/72) with Alan Titus a matchless Celebrant (later to grow up to be a Wagnerian baritone, a Bayreuth Wotan) and a Street Chorus of incomparable



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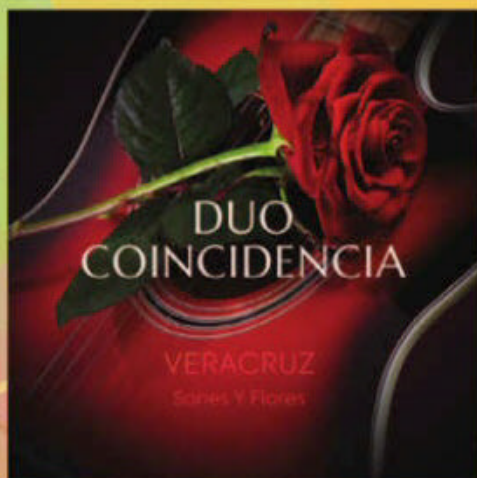
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panache and individuality. And, of course, Lenny's own overwhelming presence.

The final pages of *Mass*, not least the gathering canon of 'Lauda, laude' culminating in the heart-stopping final appearance of the Chorale, is Bernstein at his most unashamedly generous and glorious. I wonder why they left off the final words 'The Mass is ended – go in peace'?

Edward Seckerson

Brahms



Ein deutsches Requiem, Op 45

Valentina Farcas *sop* Matthias Goerne *bar* State Choir Latvia; Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen / Paavo Järvi

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DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at Bremen Cathedral, April 10, 2018



Aside from a crooked entry here and there, Paavo Järvi's anniversary account of the *German Requiem*,

performed a century and a half to the day after its premiere, has much more in common with the studio-recorded symphony cycle from the same forces than it does with his 2009 recording, made live in Frankfurt for Virgin (now Erato, 7/11). Smaller, more flexible instrumental forces, for one thing, attentive to all the dynamic hairpins that impart life to long phrases taken in a single breath, both vocally and musically speaking. Where in Frankfurt the third movement built surely towards its Handelian climax, Järvi now arrests and now urges on the accompaniment to mirror the faltering steps of Matthias Goerne's restless penitent, summoning a mighty blaze from nowhere at the movement's point of crisis to launch the fugue in impetuous style.

A sense of momentum as well as occasion lends an unusual spirit of celebration, quite alien to both the sombre tread of most symphonic performances and the carefully cultivated archaism of 'period' accounts by Gardiner, Herreweghe and Norrington. The energy and sound world more nearly approach the chamber-orchestral intimacy of gesture I found so appealing about Frieder Bernius's *Carus* recording when placing it top of my Collection pile (4/08). One feature in common to both performances from Frankfurt and Bremen is the use of a small, professional chorus: the State Choir of Järvi's native Latvia in

this case, singing for him with virtuoso attention to text.

There are casualties along the way, notably any still point of repose: the adrenalin generated by the big climaxes of the second and third movements spills into 'How lovely are thy dwellings', taken at one-in-a-bar, and even Valentina Farcas's solo, which is scaled not for the microphone but to reach the far corners of Bremen Cathedral. The Requiem's premiere did not feature the fifth movement, which Brahms added later at the suggestion of his teacher, but the performance's 'authentic' credentials are more compromised by the presence of a chamber organ at floor level. Something like a 'making of' documentary would have placed the performance in useful context: we're left with a cursory booklet note and the atmosphere of a one-off occasion which does not transfer itself to film with the special insights of Welser-Möst (Belvedere, 5/17), taking his Cleveland Orchestra to St Florian, or Abbado and his Berliners in Vienna (EuroArts, 9/14), marking the centenary of the composer's death.

Peter Quantrill

Brahms

'Songs of Loss and Betrayal'

Lieder und Gesänge, Op 32. Lieder

und Gesänge von GF Däumer, Op 57.

Fünf Lieder, Op 94. Fünf Lieder, Op 105

Simon Wallfisch *bar* Edward Rushton *pf*

Resonus © RES10258 (62) • DDD • T/t)



The title for this album might suggest a mixed recital, picking and choosing songs

along the theme from across Brahms's song output. It's perhaps a measure of quite how heavily the themes of loss and betrayal – and more generally just unhappiness in love – feature across the composer's oeuvre that the title fits so well to four complete opus sets.

And that's what we have here, making this both a useful selection and a rewarding recital, and one that offers a welcome chance to hear some of the more popular songs in context. Simon Wallfisch and Edward Rushton prove eloquent, expert guides. Wallfisch's baritone is a sturdy, authoritative instrument, if not the most mellifluous or seductive: there's a tendency to harshness at louder volumes. He and Rushton chart a far less introspective, luxuriant course through the Op 32 *Lieder und Gesänge*, for instance, than Matthias Goerne and Christoph

Eschenbach on their *Gramophone* Award-winning Brahms disc.

But the baritone offers impressive conviction, a natural sense of communication and a broad dynamic range, both from song to song and within each number: 'Es träumte mir' provides a good case in point. There's tenderness in 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer', a lovely lilt to 'Die Schnur, die Perl an Perle' and plenty of grand passion when called for. Rushton, who provides his own clear and effective translations of the texts in the booklet, offers superb support: discreet, subtle and beautifully shaded. With fine engineering, this adds up to an enjoyable recital that's well worth seeking out.

Hugo Shirley

Lieder und Gesänge, Op 32 – selected comparison:

Goerne, Eschenbach (9/16) (HARM) HMC90 2174

F Couperin • Gesualdo

F Couperin *Leçons de Ténèbres*

Gesualdo *Tenebrae Responsories*

Tenebrae / Nigel Short

Signum © SIGCD622 (77) • DDD • T/t)



This really does look like two recordings on one disc. The works it presents are so

radically different in style, tone and scoring that it is hard to imagine circumstances in which one would want to hear the two of them together. And that includes Maundy Thursday, for which they were both written. But perhaps that isn't the point.

Couperin's divine *Leçons de Ténèbres* – quietly profound settings of the Lamentations for one and two voices with continuo – are true masterpieces of Baroque church music, the subject of over two dozen recordings reaching back to the 1930s. Some have focused on the music's unutterable melodic beauty, others on conveying matters of text, and this one favours the former, making good use of two well-matched sopranos with classically attractive, English-style voices. Indeed, though French Latin pronunciation is used, some listeners may wish for a fruitier colouring to the vowels. Julia Doyle, singing the first *leçon*, shows a good grasp of the music's expressive workings, leaning ardently on its aching dissonances but refraining from histrionics; surprisingly, she seems to take more breaths than usual in these pieces. Grace Davidson in the second does less with the words but is more fluid and pacy, and her voice floats more gratefully on the air. When the two combine in the third *leçon* they seem to egg

each other on to raise the expressive stakes a little; but overall these performances are what one might call coolly beautiful.

By the time you have listened to Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories*, Couperin's exquisitely composed world will seem far away. Even for a madrigalist known for his extreme use of dissonance, this is extraordinary stuff, playing out Jesus's betrayal in tortured, jagged music that in places is almost too painful to listen to. The singing of six members of *Tenebrae* (Doyle and Davidson the sopranos) is accomplished, snappy and defined, with firm control of changing dynamics. Nigel Short shows a strong sense of mannerist storytelling, using the text as a spur to action and unafraid to assault the ear when things get chromatically heated; the way the words sometimes shout into the silence of the church is immensely powerful. This is angry, compelling music, not to be mistaken for easy background polyphony.

Lindsay Kemp

Howells

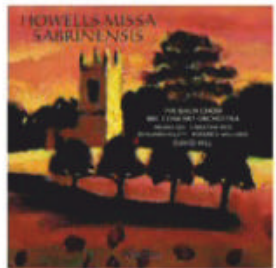
Missa Sabrinensis^a. Michael, 'A Fanfare Setting'

^aHelena Dix sop ^aChristine Rice mez ^aBenjamin

Hulett ten ^aRoderick Williams bar The Bach Choir;

BBC Concert Orchestra / David Hill

Hyperion © CDA68294 (72' • DDD • T/t)



'Its proportions are modest in comparison with the Mass in B minor or the *Missa*

solemnis', wrote *The Musical Times* rather dismissively in 1954 of Herbert Howells's latest work. The comment is also deeply misleading, because the *Missa Sabrinensis* is monumental, vast – a great wave of near-operatic emotion and intensity breaking over an intricate structural scaffolding.

Often closer to Verdi than Vaughan Williams, Howells's Mass-setting goes further than even *Hymnus Paradisi* at full spate towards giving the lie to the casual dismissal of the composer as one of England's pastoral also-rans. The scope of the piece and its layered, contrapuntal construction – more choral symphony than conventional Mass, as Jonathan Clinch's illuminating booklet note points out – set it apart. Choral voices become a single strand, soloists another, in a densely woven texture in which the orchestra is less support than rival, sparring partner, urging on and amplifying.

Shaped in an arc, building up to the insistent collective cries of 'Sanctus' before falling away to a hazy-soft conclusion in the

Agnus Dei, the Mass is an appealing mixture of baleful, modal Englishness and more perfumed Continental Impressionism. Solo lines rise up out of the choral body of the *Kyrie* like incense smoke, weaving and dissolving into one another. It's a texture that returns, suddenly exposed, in the *Benedictus*, where solo soprano and a single flute pass phrases lazily to and fro – a moment of exquisite intimacy at the heart of a work that's all about the collective, the massed.

While *Hymnus Paradisi* and the Requiem have been well served on disc, just a single account of the *Severn Mass* has existed until now. The 2005 Chandos recording by the LSO and Gennady Rozhdestvensky is lush but hazy, indistinct. Washes of sound and gesture catch the essence of the work but not its close-up detail – something we get here in a texturally high-definition performance from David Hill and the superbly trained amateurs of The Bach Choir.

Hill also has the edge with soloists. Bigger voices ride and soar over the chorus and BBC Concert Orchestra, led by Helena Dix's ecstatic, rapturous soprano. Singing the music's lines rather than its genre, she steers us firmly into the opera house, supported by Christine Rice in heady moments of duet, with tenor Benjamin Hulett and baritone Roderick Williams risking daring and heroic things below.

It's an electrifying performance: one of those you never knew you were waiting for but can't imagine now ever doing without.

Alexandra Coghlan

Comparative version:

LSO, Rozhdestvensky (6/95^R) (CHAN) CHAN241-27

Lewandowski

Eighteen Liturgical Psalms

Hungarian Radio Choir / Andor Izsák

DG © 483 7724 (81' • DDD • T/t)



Unfamiliar as I was with the music of Louis Lewandowski (1821-94), the first

name that came to mind on listening to his music was Mendelssohn; and surely enough, the fascinating booklet notes by the conductor Andor Izsák inform us that Lewandowski was taken under the wing of Alexander Mendelssohn, a cousin of Felix. His ascent was rapid, not only on that account but also because he was an extremely talented musician, and the dramatic intensity of the psalm-settings recorded here is testimony to his compositional gifts.

Lewandowski was also a reformer, and pushed for the introduction of the organ and of mixed choirs into synagogue worship, something that was highly controversial. Most of the settings here are brief but there are some longer-breathed works that show what a Lewandowski oratorio might have been like, such as *Deine Wege, Ewiger, mache mir kund*, a setting of verses from Psalm 25, which includes a dramatic solo superbly rendered here by Lúcia Megyesi Schwartz. The two longest settings are *Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen* (Psalm 84), with a substantial organ introduction and effective use of canonic writing in alternation with dramatically shaded homophonic passages and, once more, an extended solo, and *Preise, meine Seele, den Ewigen* (Psalm 103), which has two solo sections interspersed with some of the most affirmative, jubilant writing on the disc.

Izsák, who directs the Hungarian Radio Choir in performances that are colourful and full of energy, notes that this music, printed in 1879, was thought to be lost until it was rediscovered a hundred years later and published by Breitkopf & Härtel in an edition by him; this is the first recording. His investment of time and effort has certainly paid off in this excellently recorded disc, which sheds a valuable light on the work of Jewish music in general during this period and particularly on that of this innovative and talented composer who began life in a small Prussian village. Ivan Moody

B Parry

'The Hours'

Ar hyd y nos. Ave verum corpus. Early one morning. Eclipse. First Day. God be in my head. Golden slumbers. Lighten our darkness. The Lord's Prayer. Music: An Ode. My heart's in the Highlands. My spirit sang all day. New Year Carol. Nunc dimittis. O nata lux de lumine. Sonnet XXVII. Snow. Two Spring Sonnets. Sun Soul. Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon

The Choir of Royal Holloway / Rupert Gough with Simon Marlow pf Liam Condon org
Signum © SIGCD629 (78' • DDD • T)



As a former Swingle Singer and currently artistic director and principal conductor of the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, Ben Parry knows better than almost anyone what works for young voices, what they enjoy singing and how to get the best out of them. You can hear the results clearly in this collection of his own choral music, efficiently recorded

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**David Hill*

The conductor discusses Howells's *Missa Sabrinensis*, a large-scale choral and orchestral work from 1954 that had to wait almost 30 years for its second performance

How did you get to know Howells's *Missa Sabrinensis*?

The Bach Choir's commitment, and my enthusiasm, to record Howells's trilogy of choral and orchestral works was found to culminate with the *Missa Sabrinensis*. When I first glanced at it, I was both alarmed and amazed by the intricacy, scale and difficulty of the score. I, and others, felt the entire work needed rethinking in terms of internal dynamic shape within the orchestration. I set about adjusting that task for the new score and parts published by Novello. I was grateful to have the assistance of Paul Spicer in that process. There is so much detail within this score deserving of clarity and exposure and this was an opportunity to grasp.

Why is this masterpiece so little known?

I would suggest the overriding reason is the complexity and insufficient rehearsal time. I felt in wishing to do the work justice, the handwritten full score and parts had to be published in a readable, modern format. As a result, the wonderful BBC Concert Orchestra could make instant headway with the technical and musical challenges. I sense there had been a reluctance to programme the work, even at The Three Choirs Festival, for fear of being able to master the technical demands with understandably limited

rehearsal availability. The Bach Choir, themselves excellent readers and musicians, found it to be one of the most challenging works they had undertaken. And so did I!

Quite apart from the difficulties it poses in performance, is it a challenge to capture this work's sheer scale on a recording?

Yes, absolutely – but we were helped by an amazing engineer and producer, Deborah Stanton and Andrew Walton respectively. We discussed the need for clarity of textures and knowing where to focus those aspects at any given moment. The orchestra are not there purely for accompanying the choir and soloists; they are an inextricable aspect of the counterpoint in all its complexity. The mixing process was complex and we did our best to capture as much as we could. Hearing the *Missa Sabrinensis* is a little like viewing the edifice of a cathedral from a distance, realising its overall architecture and then moving in more closely to capture the detail.

What connections does the work have with, say, the more familiar *Hymnus Paradisi*?



It extends the techniques Howells had absorbed which he then extends even more in terms of counterpoint, harmony, motivic material and the sheer scale of the work. It is his Choral Symphony, expressing so much of what had influenced him in his upbringing in Gloucestershire, his connections with Worcester, and the river 'Severn' ('Sabrina'). Alongside all that there are the composers who had most influenced him, in particular Elgar and Vaughan Williams; and yet the musical language is, unquestionably, his own.

here by Rupert Gough and The Choir of Royal Holloway.

To say that this is a disc of highly functional choral music isn't to damn with faint praise, rather to highlight Parry's priorities and the practical understanding that shapes his composition. Anthems are, broadly, compact and easily within the grasp of a church choir's rehearsal time; secular works are often homophonic or written with the unobtrusive support of piano accompaniment. Many are commissions from youth choirs or school groups, and you can hear in works such as *Snow* and Parry's setting of the *New Year Carol* how effectively he deploys simple textures and devices to strong dramatic effect.

Text is king in Parry's sensitive, pastel-coloured settings, which follow the

descriptive contours of verse with careful attention. The composer's taste for rather Victorian texts (and I include living poet and regular collaborator Garth Bardsley in that) can make for a rather perfumed, cloying sweetness, especially when allied to Parry's ingenuous, American-style tonal language, but the effect is glossy and polished and the works always well crafted.

Gough's singers revel in the wide, arching phrases and word-painting Parry offers them, though you can't help feeling that the men get the short end of the straw in settings that so often leave the melody to the top line, using the lower voices for support and ballast.

I'm not sure the disc works as a recital but as a resource for choral directors it will be invaluable. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Pärt • MacMillan • Vasks

'Stabat'

MacMillan Miserere Pärt Da pacem, Domine.

Magnificat. Nunc dimittis. Stabat mater^a.

The Woman with the Alabaster Box

Vasks Plainscapes^b

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross

with ^bJamie Campbell *vn* ^bOliver Coates *vc*

^aThe Dmitri Ensemble

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5323 (80' • DDD • T/t)



This is a focused and absorbing programme, splicing choral works by Pärt with Vasks's *Plainscapes* and MacMillan's *Magnificat*. It finds the Clare College Choir a long way from its boxy,

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enunciation-sharpening home acoustic (the listed venues are Ely Cathedral's Lady Chapel and All Hallows, Gospel Oak), which must have been liberating but poses a whole new set of questions. The highlight is Pärt's 27-minute *Stabat mater*, whose meditative arc roots both singers and players more into a form of collective expression, one that strikes a workable deal between solemnity and event and which uses the acoustic respectfully to its advantage.

Perhaps the more consistent tone there comes, in part, from the fact that the SAT scoring draws the tenors up into a lighter, higher place than down the other way; in *The Woman with the Alabaster Box* and elsewhere (and in the *Stabat's* 'Fac ut portem') the male singers can upset the balance and curdle the blend, particularly in the big chords of the MacMillan, where the ensemble sounds most like a small student chapel choir relying on a reverberant acoustic for assistance (and the male singers ham up the chants where the female ones don't).

The choir shows the best of its blends in Pärt's clean, triadic architecture – sopranos on point in the *Magnificat*, with clear colours from the whole ensemble in the *Nunc dimittis* (and a breathtaking depiction of the work's sudden shard of blazing light) and real meaning in the gentle undulation, kept in check, of *Da pacem, Domine*. Drones are pure and steady; cloud-like chords are placed surely but atmospherically in the acoustic's recessed spaces. But the acoustic set-up of Vasks's *Plainscapes* is frustrating, the far horizon weakened by the close proximity of the strings, which cruelly renders the violin solo workaday. The climax is also far more effective and structurally fitting when delivered more firmly but less frenzied. But while there might be more authoritative performances of each of these works available, nowhere are they ranged as thoughtfully on disc as here.

Andrew Mellor

Rachmaninov

Before my window, Op 26 No 10. Six Songs, Op 4 – No 4, Sing not to me, beautiful maiden; No 5, Oh thou, my field; No 6, How long, my friend. Six Songs, Op 8 – No 3, Brooding; No 5, The Dream; No 6, A Prayer. Six Songs, Op 38. Twelve Songs, Op 21 – No 3, Twilight; No 5, Lilacs; No 7, How fair this spot; No 12, How painful for me. Fourteen Songs, Op 34 – No 1, The Muse; No 12, What happiness; No 14, Vocalise. Spring Waters, Op 14 No 11

Julia Sitkovetsky sop Roger Vignoles pf
Hyperion © CDA68309 (58' • DDD)



Think Rachmaninov romances and one thinks of sighing poets, unrequited love

and plenty of Russian doom and gloom, usually sung by despairing baritones. The soprano Julia Sitkovetsky duly includes 'Brooding', from the composer's Op 8 set, on this new Hyperion album with the pianist Roger Vignoles, but they also demonstrate the wide emotional range of Rachmaninov's 80+ songs in their shrewd selection.

They begin with his last songs, the Op 38 set Rachmaninov wrote in 1916. Gerard McBurney's excellent notes point to the composer's shock at the death of Alexander Scriabin the year before, and his attempts to understand the modernism of his music. Nature plays a leading role in the six songs, from slender poplars and weeping willows to grasses soaked in dew. Sitkovetsky sings with real passion, and is emotive, even if that means compromising beauty of tone on occasion. She is very flirtatious in 'The Rat-Catcher' and floats *mezza voce* with intimacy in 'A Dream'. The reference point here is Elisabeth Söderström, who recorded the complete songs with Vladimir Ashkenazy in the 1970s. Sitkovetsky doesn't quite capture the delicious coyness of 'Daisies' as well as Söderström but her vibrato is much less marked. As sensitively as Vignoles plays, Ashkenazy – one of the great Rachmaninov pianists bar none – is more imaginative and playful.

Rachmaninov's most famous songs don't always come off well. 'Sing not to me, beautiful maiden' is not as voluptuous as one often hears and there is occasional sliding of notes (à la Renée Fleming) which strikes me as a bit artful. But she is duly ecstatic in 'Spring Waters' and she hits the top notes of 'How fair this spot' with beautiful shading of dynamics. Vignoles is at his finest in the shimmering piano colours of 'Lilacs', a gorgeous performance. 'Vocalise' is kept on the move, perhaps a fraction too swiftly, but it crowns a fine disc, well recorded in the warm acoustic of East Finchley's All Saints' Church.

Mark Pullinger

Songs – selected comparison:

Söderström, Ashkenazy (DECC/LOND) 436 920-2LM3

Schubert • Beethoven

Beethoven An die ferne Geliebte, Op 98

Schubert Schwanengesang, D957

Roderick Williams bar Iain Burnside pf

Chandos © CHAN20126 (65' • DDD • T/t)



While recently hearing Matthias Goerne's deadly serious Beethoven

Lieder disc (DG, 4/20), I kept thinking that what this music really needs is Roderick Williams and his ever-buoyant treatment of text. And here he is with the pianist Iain Burnside, performing Beethoven's meticulously integrated *An die ferne Geliebte* along with Schubert's discursive, wide-ranging *Schwanengesang*.

Schubert is the disc's main event, a fascinating unthemed collection of songs that was posthumously titled not by the composer but by his publisher, and which though widely recorded comes with no standard interpretative approach. At times, the composer expanded on many of his trademark techniques; at others, he went beyond the bleak, musically spare terrains of *Winterreise*. While some singers begin *Schwanengesang* with the weightier Heinrich Heine songs, Williams starts with the more tradition-based Ludwig Rellstab settings and from there successfully encompasses the huge range of vocal demands, seemingly with stronger identification with this music's expanding artistic vistas than in his recording of Schubert's more contained *Die schöne Müllerin* (8/19).

Any lyric baritone such as Williams plays by different rules from the likes of Hans Hotter (Warner Classics), the ideal Wagnerian voice for songs such as 'Atlas'. In the larger picture of *Schwanengesang*, Williams has lovely tenor-ish colours put to good use but also summons, out of artistic willpower, more than the necessary amplitude for the dark confrontation of 'Der Doppelgänger'. At the same time, Williams the composer is also making cool assessments of what the music needs. Though his 'Der Doppelgänger' is as intense as any I've heard, he doesn't stretch the tempo to breaking point, with a timing (3'37") that's at least a minute shorter than performances by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. This music may be Schubert composing on the edge of his early 19th-century world, but it's still not Shostakovich.

On language matters, Williams sings German as a non-native speaker in the best sense, harnessing the words with a sense of discovery of how much closer they bring him to the archetypes within the various verses, to which he brings particular sympathy. And it's on this front that his reading of the Beethoven cycle shines, with a feeling for the words that keeps the more

strophically structured songs from seeming redundant, supported by Burnside's sense of rubato that's beautifully fashioned to the emotional temperature at hand. This disc doesn't displace classic accounts – such as Goerne's live pairing of the same repertoire with Alfred Brendel (Decca, 7/05), which John Warrack called 'one of the great Lieder partnerships of the day' – but stands beside them. Williams fires on all cylinders here, including some I didn't know he had, and his longtime admirers won't want to miss this. **David Patrick Stearns**

Stradella

San Giovanni Battista

Le Banquet Céleste / Damien Guillon *countertenor*

Alpha © ALPHA579 (81' • DDD • T/t)



San Giovanni Battista was composed in 1675

for performance in the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini in Rome. Although an oratorio, not an opera, it's highly dramatic. When John condemns Herod for marrying his brother's wife, it is Salome (here called Herodias the Daughter) who asks if Herod will tolerate the insult; but, as in the New Testament, it's 'Herodias the Mother' who tells her daughter to demand John's head.

The four characters, together with the Counsellor, combine to form the chorus of John's disciples or Herod's courtiers. The instrumental group is divided into a concertino and a concerto grosso, who play in various permutations; Herod's vengeance aria, 'Tuonerà tra mille turbini', is accompanied first by the latter, then by the concertino (tracks 16 and 17). The opening gives a good idea of the flexibility of both construction and instrumentation. As John bids farewell to his surroundings, *secco* recitative frames a tuneful arioso, still with continuo accompaniment, followed by a short passage for the concertino. Then, after an exchange with the disciples, a vigorous metaphor aria features both string groups together.

The part of John was first sung by the castrato known as Siface (whose departure after a brief stay in London was marked by Purcell with his harpsichord piece *Sefauchi's Farewell* and who, like Stradella himself, was later murdered). Paul-Antoine Benos-Djian has a beautiful countertenor voice, full and even at both ends of his range, which he uses to superbly expressive effect. Olivier Dejean, not entirely comfortable with Herod's low notes, is excellent at depicting the character's bluster and

uncertainty. Alicia Amo as Herodias the Daughter (Salome) is quite wonderful in her final aria, 'Sù, coronatemi', where she exults in John's death with dazzling coloratura. The last number is a duet where Salome and Herod express happiness and torment respectively but ask 'why, tell me, why?', ending – clever Stradella! – on a questioning chord on the dominant.

Of earlier recordings, Tess Knighton welcomed one by Michael Schuster and La Stagione, but with reservations (DHM, 5/91). Nicholas Anderson was enthusiastic in his review of Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre (Erato, 10/92). Comparison with the excellent Hyperion recording shows some interesting differences: the Academia Montis Regalis have a much larger concerto grosso, which makes it easier to distinguish between the two string groups; I slightly prefer the lightness of Le Banquet Céleste. Salome's aria is much faster than on Hyperion, where it's assigned to the mother; whereas John's 'Io per me non cangerei' is much slower, giving Benos-Djian the opportunity to relish the chromatic inflexions. (Incidentally, the track number is incorrectly placed in the booklet.)

Anybody who owns the Hyperion can rest content, but newcomers should try this present version under the excellent direction of Damien Guillon. The important thing is to get to know this ravishing piece. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparison:

Academia Montis Regalis, De Marchi

(2/08) (HYPE) CDA67617

'Les plaisirs du Louvre'

Anonymous M de Liancourt. Les Suisses. Les Suissesses. Les vallets de la faiste **Boësset** Aime-moi Cloris. Astres pleins de malheurs (Récit de la nuit). Bien loin profanes de ces lieux (Concert des nymphes des bois). Ce roi vainqueur de nos malheurs (Pour le Roy). Conseille-moi mon coeur (David disgrâcié). Fut-il jamais une rigueur pareille. Je perds le repos et les sens. Je suis l'adorable Équité. Me veux-tu voir mourir. Monarque triomphant (Au Roy). Ne vante point flambeau des cieux. Ô mort l'objet de mes plaisirs. Que prétendez-vous mes désirs. Reine que je sers et que je connais (Concert de Diane et ses nymphes). Segua chi vuol iniquo Amore **Chambonnières** L'entretien des Dieux **Chancy** Rares fleurs vivante peinture **L Couperin** Le Piémontoise **Guédron** Cesse mortel d'importuner (Juste mespris de sainte Agnez). Quel tourments rigoureux (Le Purgatoire) **Louis XIII** Les Gascons **Moulinié** Il sort de nos corps emplumés (Concert de différents oyseaux). Ô doux sommeil. Rompez les charmes du sommeil (Air de la ridicule)

Ensemble Correspondances / Sébastien Daucé
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5320 (81' • DDD • T/t)



The pleasures here are not concerned with the pictures and sculpture of the present-day

museum but with musical activity in the reign of Louis XIII, when the Louvre was the monarch's principal residence. The *air de cour*, a short setting of verses that could be performed in various configurations from voice and lute to an ensemble of voices and instruments, was popular in the salons of Paris as well as at court. There was also music for the ballets that were danced by the king and queen and the courtiers, played by professional musicians. The most important composer was Antoine Boësset: he published nine volumes of *Airs de cour à 4 & 5 parties* between 1617 and 1642 and, as Surintendant de la Musique de la Chambre du Roi, he was responsible for organising the musical entertainment both public and private.

Of the 28 tracks on this enjoyable CD, 15 are devoted to Boësset. The subjects include love – more the pains than the pleasures thereof, actually – and sycophantic addresses to the king. One song, 'Conseille-moi mon coeur', is a recasting of his 'Qui vit jamais amant' to a religious text. It was published in Boësset's lifetime, so would have had his approval: more than can be said of the adaptation of the two numbers by Pierre Guédron, his father-in-law and predecessor, which appeared posthumously.

The pieces are mainly homophonic with a touch of counterpoint here and there, as in Boësset's 'Monarque triomphant'. Many are in the minor key, and often in triple time. The predominant mood is one of delicate wistfulness: this is not a musical world of aching suspensions and chromaticism. The singers of Ensemble Correspondances, led by the sopranos Caroline Weynants, Caroline Bardot and Élodie Fonnard, are a beautifully blended team who express these refined sentiments to perfection. A good example is Boësset's 'Me veux-tu voir mourir', a restrained performance for SATB; another approach can be enjoyed on 'L'esprit galant' (Channel Classics, 5/08), where Johannette Zomer sings a solo version a semitone higher, with brighter tone and more prominent decoration.

There's excellent support from a consort of viols, a flute and a continuo group under Sébastien Daucé. Pleasures indeed!

Richard Lawrence



Colour and energy: the Hungarian Radio Choir and conductor Andor Izsák revivify 19th-century psalm-settings by Louis Lewandowski – see review on page 68

'Sacred Handel'

'Music for the Carmelite Vespers – Rome 1700'

Anonymous Praeambulum ad organi

Bononcini Laudate pueri **Colonna** Psalmi ad Vesperas, Op 12 – Domine ad adjuvandum; Lauda Jerusalem **Corelli** Concerto grosso, Op 6 No 6 – Adagio; Allegro **Frescobaldi** Il secondo libro di toccate – Magnificat secundi toni per l'organo **Handel** Dixit Dominus, HWV232. Haec est regina, HWV235. Te decus virgineum, HWV243 **Kerll** Modulatio organica – Praeambulum ad organi **Pasquini** Sessanta versetti una pastorale – Praeambulum ad organi **A Scarlatti** Vespro di Santa Cecilia – Nisi Dominus

Italian Chamber Choir; Musica Antiqua Latina / Giordano Antonelli

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 19439 71117-2
(71' • DDD • T/t)



This problematically titled album explores numerous composers who participated in the annual feast of the Madonna del Carmine (July 16) celebrated at S Maria di Montesanto in Rome during the 1690s and early 1700s. Luca della Libera's scholarly note reports evidence found in the Vatican

archives that the Carmelite Vespers celebrations featured music-making by Corelli and his orchestra, the Bolognese Colonna, his pupils the Bononcini brothers, and Alessandro Scarlatti. A broad picture of the sorts of things that might have been used in a complete Carmelite liturgy (although not on any single occasion) is compiled using chants taken from different suitable sources and performed in different ways, a few different bells tolling, and numerous short pieces by Kerll, Pasquini and Frescobaldi played solemnly by organist Salvatore Carchiolo.

Handel wrote five pieces for the Carmelites' Vespers services in 1707 and possibly 1708 (two psalms, a soprano solo motet and two alto solo antiphons). Both brief antiphons are included here; the psalms and motet are not. Deutsche Harmonia Mundi perpetuates the annoying myth that *Dixit Dominus* was composed for the Carmelites (it was finished in early April 1707 for an unknown occasion). Giordano Antonelli's desire to include it is more comprehensible than why he replaced its second and third movements with Gregorian plainchants. The 13-strong Coro da Camera Italiano sing with admirably shaded rhythmical inflections that are let down sometimes by inconsistent

tuning. The strings of Musica Antiqua Latina convey characterful musical ideas despite sporadic technical infelicities. Antonelli's quick pacing and shaping spring a few surprises, such as a rapidly dextrous 'Conquassabit', and the soprano duo, quiet pulsing strings and men's unison intonations in 'De torrente' are balanced meticulously.

Recorded in the authentic reverberance of S Maria di Montesanto, the collective ensemble's flaws are exposed uncomfortably in Colonna's *Domine ad adjuvandum* and concise *Lauda Jerusalem* (both 1694). However, the *stile antico* 'Amen' conclusion to Alessandro Scarlatti's short minor-key *Nisi Dominus* (c1721-72) brings out the best from the choir. Antonio Maria Bononcini's *Laudate pueri* (1693) interweaves Adriano Ancarani's murmuring cello obbligato with countertenor Antonello Dorigo's sensitivity; he is less steady in Handel's *Haec est regina virginum* but sings *Te decus virgineum* with warm poetic eloquence (and unison violins play rhetorical figures with finesse). A sung *Magnificat* is substituted with a Frescobaldi organ toccata, and two movements from Corelli's Op 6 No 6 played with effective chiaroscuro form the postlude. **David Vickers**

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **James Jolly**'s point of departure is ...

Korngold's Violin Concerto (1945)

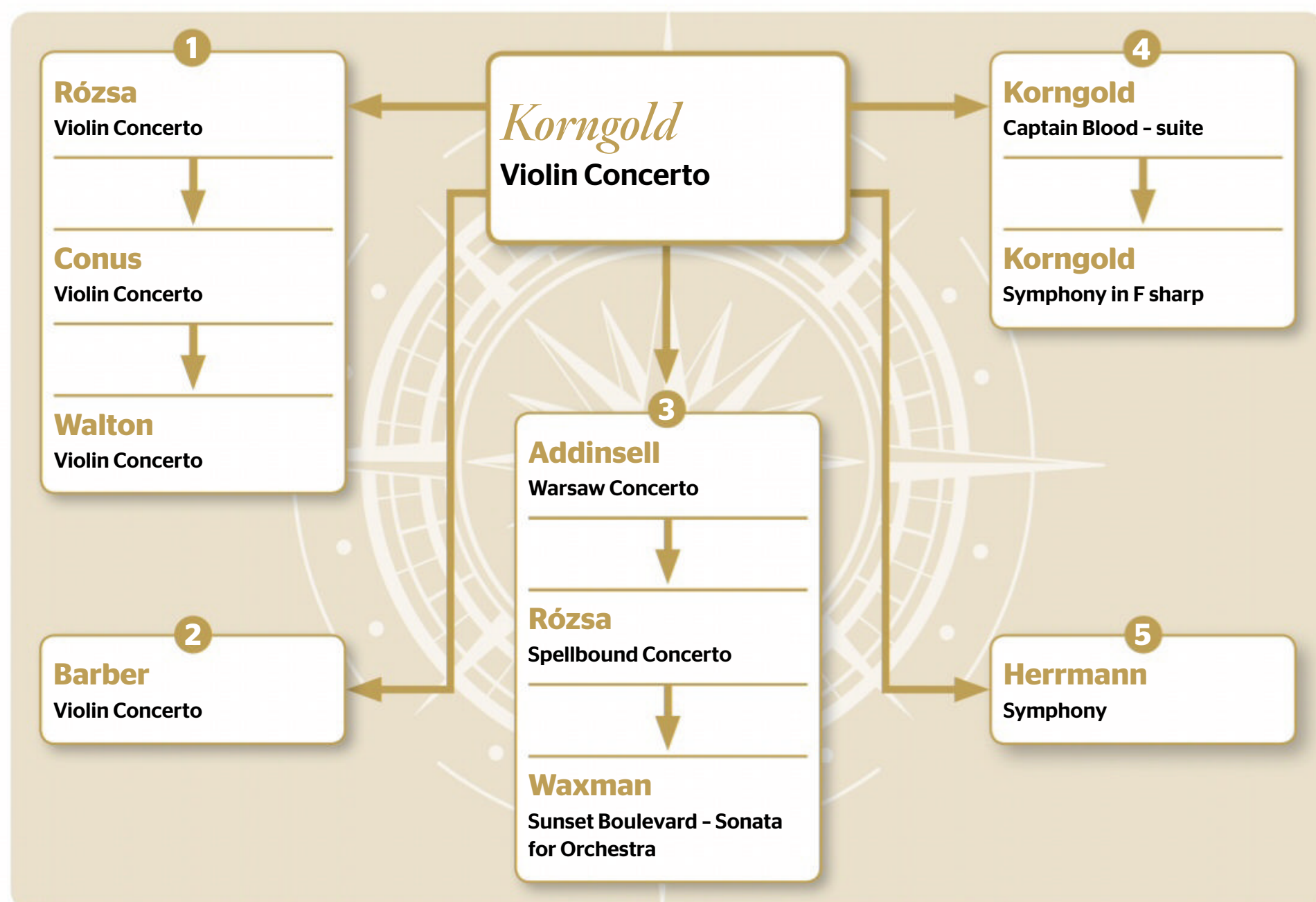
For 30 years, the violinist Bronisław Huberman nagged Korngold every time he saw him with 'Erich, where's my concerto?'. But Korngold, who'd moved to Hollywood in 1934 and become one of the most successful film composers of the day (winning two Oscars by 1938), had vowed not to write any more concert music until 'the monster in Europe is removed from the world'. In 1945, with Hitler dead, Korngold could return to the concert hall, and his Violin Concerto was written with Jascha Heifetz in mind to introduce it to the world. Weaving in some themes from film scores he'd written over the past decade, its lush orchestration and soaring melodies combined with Heifetz's God-

given virtuosity ensured this was a work with a future, and now it sits within the core violin concerto repertoire, as witnessed by Andrew Haveron's glorious new recording with John Wilson.

● Andrew Haveron; RTÉ Concert Orch / John Wilson (Chandos, 5/20)

1 *A Heifetz trio*

Rózsa Violin Concerto (1953) Miklós Rózsa's concerto, a work he'd started in his twenties and returned to in his forties, is an obvious 'what next?' – a film composer writing for the concert hall in a palpably 'film-music' idiom, combined with the presence of



Heifetz as its first soloist, and it benefitted enormously from his patronage. It's a fine work that deserves to be heard more often.

● Jascha Heifetz; Dallas SO / Walter Hendl (RCA, 5/65)

Conus Violin Concerto (1898) Julius Conus's concerto was not written for Heifetz but he put it on the map in the USA (as well as recording it). Rich, very Russian and demanding a big technique (Itzhak Perlman is another champion), it's an impressive piece.

● Jascha Heifetz; RCA Victor SO / Izler Solomon (RCA, 9/55)

Walton Violin Concerto (1938-9) One of the most enduring of Heifetz's many commissions, he premiered it (in its first version) in Cleveland in December 1939 (a revised version was unveiled in 1944). Like the Korngold, its melodies soar and its orchestration is wonderfully inventive, though a few degrees 'cooler'. It's one of the gems of 20th-century violin concertos and understandably much recorded.

● James Ehnes; Vancouver SO / Bramwell Tovey (Onyx, 2/07)

2 *A one-off modern masterpiece*

Barber Violin Concerto (1939) Often coupled with Korngold's concerto, Samuel Barber's similarly draws on the lyricism of the violin's armoury, though the finale puts any fiddler through his or her paces. Much performed and recorded in the past three or four decades, it's another core work of the modern concerto repertoire.

● Joshua Bell; Baltimore SO / David Zinman (Decca, 7/97)

3 *Mini piano concertos for the movies*

Addinsell Warsaw Concerto (1941) Written for the film *Dangerous Moonlight* in the style of Rachmaninov (whose Second Piano Concerto proved too expensive to use, though it made a central role in David Lean's *Brief Encounter* of 1945), the *Warsaw Concerto* became a huge hit and spawned a mini-genre for the cinema ...

● Martin Roscoe; BBC Philharmonic / Rumon Gamba (Chandos, 5/03)

Rózsa Spellbound Concerto (1945) ... including this similar creation by Miklós Rózsa which emerged from the Hitchcock movie of the same name, and which employs the big love theme for Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck. With surging orchestral lines and Rachmaninovian piano writing it pushes all the buttons.

● Daniel Adni; Bournemouth SO / Kenneth Alwyn (CfP, 5/80)

Waxman Sunset Boulevard - Sonata for Orchestra (1950/93) Not quite a concerto, though it has a prominent part for piano, this Sonata for Orchestra was created in 1993 by John Mauceri from Franz Waxman's Oscar-winning score for the Billy Wilder movie, surely the masterpiece among his many scores. It's a winner, and this recording, conducted by Mauceri himself, is very classy.

● Hollywood Bowl Orchestra / John Mauceri (Decca, 1/95)

4 *Korngold at the movies and later*

Korngold Captain Blood - suite (1935) Korngold's first symphonic



Music with a sprinkling of magic courtesy of the movies

score for Hollywood brought him an Oscar nomination and the movie made a star of Errol Flynn. Korngold initially declined, feeling that a swashbuckling movie about pirates was hardly his thing, but on seeing an early cut he changed his mind and wrote one of his most thrilling scores, with some quite ravishing orchestral writing (the masterly 'Sold into slavery' sequence has surely inspired film composers ever since.)

● London Symphony Orchestra / André Previn (DG, 3/02)

Korngold Symphony in F sharp (1947-52) Written in memory of Franklin D Roosevelt who had died in 1945, Korngold's only symphony, like the Violin Concerto, draws one of its themes from a movie score (here *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*). It's an impressive creation of range and ambition, and it packs quite an emotional punch. As Korngold authority Brendan Carroll says, it is also 'possibly the most personal work that Korngold composed and seems to sum up his own artistic struggle'. Its lengthy third-movement *Adagio* recalls an orchestral world explored by Korngold's childhood champion, Gustav Mahler. It owes its modern-day renaissance to Rudolf Kempe, no less, but don't expect a finer performance than this one under John Wilson.

● Sinfonia of London / John Wilson (Chandos, 10/19)

5 *A symphonic conclusion*

Herrmann Symphony (1941) Like Korngold, the American Bernard Herrmann wrote for the concert hall as well as being one of the great movie composers (from *Citizen Kane* of 1941, via *Vertigo*, *Psycho*, *North by Northwest*, *Fahrenheit 451* and numerous others, to *Taxi Driver* of 1976), but he longed to be remembered as a conductor – and he championed an extraordinary range of music in that role. His Symphony was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic and CBS, and displays a masterly command of orchestral colour as well as an impressive architectural feel. 'For the first time I was not confined to the outline of a story,' he later wrote, and this symphony allowed his imagination free rein.

● National PO / Bernard Herrmann Treasure Island Records (2/76)

Available to stream on Apple Music

Opera



Richard Bratby watches an at times unsettling *Tales of Hoffmann*:

'Ermonela Jaho projects an endless, luminous stream of tone that suggests a woman whose being flows through her voice' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



Mike Ashman enjoys a high-class *Die Walküre* from Covent Garden:

'The strong cast includes two current world leaders in Nina Stemme's Brünnhilde and Stuart Skelton's Siegmund' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

Gershwin

Porgy and Bess

Eric Owens *bass-bar* **Porgy**
Angel Blue *sop* **Bess**
Alfred Walker *bass-bar* **Crown**
Latonia Moore *sop* **Serena**
Golda Schultz *sop* **Clara**
Denyce Graves *mez* **Maria**
Ryan Speedo Green *bass-bar* **Jake**
Frederick Ballentine *ten* **Sportin' Life**

The Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra /

David Robertson

Metropolitan Opera (F) ② 1000420118 (163' • DDD)

Recorded live, September 23, October 16, 2019

Includes synopsis



As a souvenir of a great night in the theatre this attractively designed own-label

Metropolitan Opera release merits a warm recommendation. Sadly the welcome cannot be unqualified. Those anticipating a 'complete' *Porgy and Bess* along the lines of John DeMain's Houston Grand Opera presentation or Simon Rattle's Glyndebourne offshoot are likely to be disappointed. Sourced from public performances, the recording really is live – to the extent that you can hear the crowd applauding the first appearance of the set. James Robinson's Met production, which actually debuted at English National Opera in 2018, is not alone in reimagining Gershwin's intended three-act structure as a sprawling two-acter. For this CD incarnation, however, confusion reigns. The synopsis describes the action in terms of the two acts while the track-listing goes back to the original three. Either way, half an hour's music has gone AWOL. A subplot vanishes and we lose the opening piano blues, Porgy's biggest aria and more. The white detective's resort to the N-word is airbrushed away and what's left of the final scene feels inconsequential. At least the show is not turned into a musical.

These stumbling blocks aside, the news is positive. The cast is strong. If Golda

Schultz as Clara is less silvery than Barbara Hendricks for Lorin Maazel, her omission of the high note at the end of 'Summertime' is not necessarily a cop-out: it can be construed as authentic. Angel Blue's Bess might just be the finest since Leontyne Price's (with Alexander Smallens). Perhaps it had to be a soft-grained portrayal given that the pruned text gives her diminished agency, a casualty of superstition and oppression who here seems as much a victim of her own weak character and physical beauty. Latonia Moore has some of Gershwin's best music as Serena and she brings the house down with an impassioned, super-articulate account of 'My man's gone now'. Much of the disruptive mid-scene ovation is retained. Denyce Graves plays Maria, the piece's sturdiest female character. Not a huge role for the Met stalwart but a vital one, bringing dignity and verisimilitude to a community that can come across as a cardboard cut-out. She delights the audience with her delivery of 'I hates yo' struttin' style'. Likewise Leah Hawkins, spectacular, shining and free (albeit slightly under the note) as the Strawberry Woman in a telescoped street vendors' trio turned duet.

The men are fine if not quite in the same league. Eric Owens appears less affected by the health issues that impacted on his Porgy by the time of the Met's cinema relay. Though lacking Willard White's vocal ardour (especially in his earlier recording under Maazel), Owens's stoical conception of the role and grainier vocal quality are by no means incompatible with the older protagonist the story implies. Ryan Speedo Green's Jake arguably out-sings Alfred Walker's necessarily rougher-sounding Crown. For those unfamiliar with his athletic physical presence, Frederick Ballentine's vaudevillian Sportin' Life may seem at odds with the gravitas and refinement coming from the orchestra pit. David Robertson conducts with perspicacity, prizing fine detail over swing or drive – which is one way to go. He is less interventionist than Rattle, less idiomatic

than DeMain. The special chorus hired for the occasion is fabulous, the sound stage appealingly spacious yet well focused by David Frost's sound team. Camille A Brown's noisily intrusive choreography cannot be entirely eliminated. No libretto is provided but for the most part the words are wonderfully clear. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons:

Maazel (4/76^R) (DECC) 478 5785

DeMain (9/77^R) (RCA) 88697 98511-2

Rattle (6/89^R) (WARN) 9029 59006-4

Smallens, r1952 (AUDI) AUDITE23 405;

(8/08) (GUIL) GHCD2313/14

Leoncavallo



Pagliacci

Valeria Sepe *sop* **Nedda**
Angelo Villari *ten* **Canio**
Devid Cecconi *bar* **Tonio**
Matteo Mezzaro *ten* **Beppe**
Leon Kim *bar* **Silvio**

Choruses and Orchestra of the Maggio

Musicale, Florence / Valerio Galli

Stage directors **Luigi Di Gangi, Ugo Giacomazzi**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (F) CDS7863; (F) DVD 37863; (F) Blu-ray 57863

(CD75' • DVD84' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, September 11 & 13, 2019

Includes synopsis



It might seem strange that, six months after releasing a *Cavalleria rusticana* from Florence's Maggio Musicale (10/19),

Dynamic should be releasing a film (plus, as is its custom, audio-only recording) of *Pagliacci* from the same source. It features the same tenor, baritone, conductor and creative team. Federica Parolini's *Cav* set looks like it's hiding in the shadows throughout, the action of *Pag* left to play out in the space in front. Each show was in fact unveiled as part of double bills with other works – eight months apart – although presumably they will be united in the theatre's programme at some stage.



Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* – for once without its usual double-bill companion, Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* – receives an enjoyable outing in Florence

As it is, this is an enjoyable, effective performance of Leoncavallo's work. Angelo Villari is a powerful singer, with impressive ringing tone, even if he doesn't quite command the feral strength one ideally needs for the moment Canio breaks through from artifice to reality. He's not helped, admittedly, by Luigi Di Gangi and Ugo Giacomazzi's production: a deliberately grubby, grungy affair that makes little attempt to set up that boundary. The *commedia dell'arte* play-within-the-opera, for example, is performed unconvincingly on a collection of movable platforms.

Villari receives good support from Devid Cecconi's sturdy, malevolent Taddeo. Valeria Sepe is a convincingly free-spirited and impulsive Nedda who attacks the role with commitment and passion. Leon Kim is a seductive-sounding Silvio and Matteo Mezzaro makes a strong impression as a sweet-toned Beppe. There's some fine playing from the orchestra, especially in the filigree of Nedda's aria, and Valerio Galli offers once again conventional conducting that, though idiomatic, is unlikely to set the world alight.

Anyone who picked up and enjoyed the *Cav* from this source needn't hesitate in adding its stablemate here. Otherwise, though, there are more interesting and glamorously sung releases of both works

that are more recommendable – recent versions from the Salzburg Easter Festival (Sony Classical, 5/16) and Royal Opera House (Opus Arte, 12/16) for starters.

Hugo Shirley

Morlacchi

Tebaldo e Isolina

Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani *ten*.....Boemondo

Laura Polverelli *mez*.....Tebaldo

Raúl Baglietto *bass-bar*.....Ermanno

Gheorghe Vlad *ten*.....Geroldo

Sandra Pastrana *sop*.....Isolina

Annalisa D'Agosto *sop*.....Clemenza

Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań; Virtuosi

Brunensis / Antonio Fogliani

Naxos ® ② 8 660471/2 (143' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad,

Germany, July 25 & 27, 2014

Italian libretto available from naxos.com



Francesco Morlacchi doesn't exactly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with his contemporary,

Gioachino Rossini. Both composed a *Barbiere di Siviglia* – Morlacchi's actually pipped Rossini's to the stage by a few months but it hasn't stood the test of time. Born in Perugia in 1784, Morlacchi notched up more than 20 operas to his

credit, many composed in Dresden where, from 1811, he was Royal Saxon Kapellmeister of the Italian Opera. Morlacchi mainly composed *opera buffa* for Dresden, where his style suited the city's more conservative tastes, although he was challenged by the arrival of Carl Maria von Weber (the two 'tolerated' each other).

But for Italian stages, Morlacchi focused on *opera seria*. His biggest hit was *Tebaldo e Isolina*, which premiered at La Fenice, Venice, in 1822. Indeed, it was performed in 40 cities over the subsequent decade, so it was a big international success. The role of Tebaldo was written for the last great castrato, Giovanni Battista Velluti, but when it was presented in Dresden in 1825, it had to be rewritten for a contralto. Morlacchi's revision also involved cutting a handful of arias but making the existing ones more elaborate. It is the Dresden revision that is recorded here. Or, more exactly, was recorded six years ago at the 2014 Rossini in Wildbad festival. Why the long hiatus in Naxos issuing it? I have my suspicions.

The opera isn't particularly strong. It's essentially a *Romeo and Juliet*-type story set in medieval Altenburg of love across feuding families, although here there is no tragic ending as the patriarchs patch things up, however reluctantly, for the sake of their children. There are traces of Rossini

in the score, especially in the very jolly Overture and some rousing choruses, but the vocal writing isn't terribly distinctive.

Unfortunately, the cast isn't especially good either. Laura Polverelli is decent enough as Tebaldo (the Romeo figure) and her Act 2 aria 'Lo conosco!' is well sung, her dark mezzo sensitively phrased. As Isolina (the Juliet figure), Sandra Pastrana manages her florid opening aria reasonably well but her tone is quite pinched and her intonation wavers. Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani's Boemondo (Tebaldo's banished father) is strong in character but Raúl Baglietto is woolly in tone as Ermanno, head of the rival Tromberg family. Antonino Fogliani leads a spirited Virtuosi Brunensis.

A black mark to Naxos too over its presentation. While it's understandable that including a libretto in the printed booklet is a prohibitive cost, an online libretto in Italian only isn't the best way to serve Morlacchi's opera. **Mark Pullinger**

Offenbach

Les contes d'Hoffmann

John Osborn *ten*.....Hoffmann
Nina Minasyan *sop*.....Olympia
Christine Rice *mez*.....Giulietta
Ermonela Jaho *sop*.....Antonia
Irene Roberts *mez*.....Muse
Erwin Schrott *bass-bar*.....
.....Lindorf/Coppélius/Docteur Miracle/Dapertutto
Rodolphe Briand *ten*.....Spalanzani
François Lis *bass*.....Schlémil
Paul Gay *bass-bar*.....Luther/Crespel
Eva Kroon *mez*.....Voice of Antonia's Mother
Sunnyboy Dladla *ten*.....
.....Andrès/Cochenille/Frantz/Pitichinaccio
Chorus of Dutch National Opera; Rotterdam
Philharmonic Orchestra / Carlo Rizzi

Stage director **Tobias Kratzer**

Video director **Misjel Vermeiren**

C Major Entertainment © ② **DVD** 752808;

© **Blu-ray** 752904 (165' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS 5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2018

Includes synopsis



Hoffmann is a contemporary artist with stubble and a man-bun. A photographer, perhaps – screen prints and collages of his latest beloved decorate the white walls of his studio apartment, and his friends swig from bottles of Stella (get it?). So far, so laddish: the one figure in his world who seems better than all this is his unnamed Muse. Here, she's that romcom favourite, the neglected, bespectacled best

friend who's actually Ms Right: the one who stays behind when the party's over and watches over him in his drunken slumber, waiting, hoping, constantly loving.

If that was the limit of Tobias Kratzer's reimagining of *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, it would be a straightforward if effective one. Recitatives have been pruned and there's no 'Scintille, diamant'. But those two key elements – the apartment and the Muse – unlock a huge range of possibilities and fresh dramatic insights. The usual shaky distinction between the Muse and Nicklausse is erased altogether. Played with wonderful subtlety and a warm, clear mezzo by Irene Roberts, she's the same character throughout, and thanks to Rainer Sellmaier's spectacular set, she's onstage throughout too: usually in Hoffmann's apartment, which is revealed to be the brightly lit centre of a shifting, dimly lit labyrinth of rooms in which Hoffmann's tales (or fantasies) play out.

It's one of those ideas that might actually work better on video than in the theatre, and the video director Misjel Vermeiren handles it confidently, creating the illusion of split-screen effects but also focusing in on intimate moments that would surely be lost in a live performance. Giulietta – sung with thoroughly appropriate bravura by Christine Rice – is a sleazy siren at the centre of a ring of heroin users. Antonia's schoolgirl costume hints at the unhealthiness of Hoffmann's desire: Ermonela Jaho projects both fragility and an endless, luminous stream of tone that really does suggest a woman whose whole being flows through her voice.

The most troubling, however, is Olympia. No suggestion of music-box charm here; Nina Minasyan is a trafficked, sexualised child-woman, horribly dolled up in a cheap negligee and mechanically straddling Hoffmann as Minasyan peels out her coloratura with all the requisite brilliance but just enough rubato to dispel any hope that she's not fully aware of what's happening. The business with the eyes, in this context, is more than usually creepy, and Erwin Schrott is as terrific as Coppélius as he is as Lindorf, Miracle and Dapertutto – conveying a bad-boy allure with a ringing tone. He's a predatory and very real menace to John Osborn's blokish Hoffmann, who nonetheless conveys both vulnerability and a romantic ardour that strains, not ineffectively, at the outer limits of his surging, lyrical tenor.

This is emphatically not *Hoffmann* as an escapist fantasy. If at times it feels distinctly chilly, that's offset by the commitment of the performances and by the taut, responsive playing of the Rotterdam

Philharmonic under Carlo Rizzi (the orchestral colours really glow). It won't be for everyone; but if you're willing to engage with an imaginative contemporary *Contes d'Hoffmann* that doesn't shy away from the source material's more disturbing implications, Kratzer rewards you with an emotional pay-off that's both moving and thoroughly earned. **Richard Bratby**

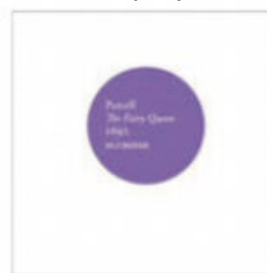
Purcell

The Fairy Queen

Anna Dennis, Mhairi Lawson, Rowan Pierce, Carolyn Sampson *sops* **Jeremy Budd, Charles Daniels, James Way** *tens* **Roderick Williams, Ashley Riches** *basses* **Gabrieli Consort and Players / Paul McCreesh**

Signum © ② SIGCD615 (138' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto



The dramatic function of Purcell's music within Thomas Betterton's extravagant

adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not as tenuous as often assumed.

Nevertheless, it makes sense that Paul McCreesh and Christopher Suckling's edition of a concert version aims to fashion 'a convincing musical narrative, despite the music being dislocated from much of its original theatrical context'. The use of low pitch (A=392Hz) enables idiomatic high tenors on 'countertenor' parts; a continuo group of several theorbos, guitar and harpsichord varies in combinations to accompany singers without bowed bass violin; and an equally balanced dozen-strong string band has bass violins on the lowest part instead of cellos (no anachronistic double basses, and seldom plucked continuo). Those used to bigger bass-driven sonorities might need to acclimatise to the airy climes of the opening Prelude but the articulation and texture of Purcell's string-writing in the hushed Rondeau (played with cultured *inégaies*) also benefits from French-style bow holds and unwound gut strings set up with equal tension.

The flexible interactions between nine soloists (with three additional singers in choruses) is impeccable – such as the free-flowing conversation between Ashley Riches's genteel Drunken Poet (not a lager lout on the rampage) and fairies teasing without malice. The comedy has the atmosphere of a sly wink rather than a bold farce, and the spell cast for the mediocre bard to 'sleep till break of day' has soft compassion. The Masque of Night sustains an exquisite mood for Titania's enchanted slumber: Carolyn Sampson's beguiling

Night is accompanied weightlessly by muted violins and violas, Anna Dennis's Mystery has intimacy and discretion, Jeremy Budd's mellifluous Secrecy is partnered sweetly with a pair of recorders, and Sleep is whispered spellbindingly by Riches (the chorus 'Hush, no more' exploits silences unerringly).

'If love's a sweet passion' is a refined duet between Dennis and James Way, with sensitive choral refrains. Sampson's gossamer-like 'Ye gentle spirits of the air' is accompanied with imagination and tact by harpsichordist Jan Waterfield, whereas the comic duet for the Mummerset haymakers Coridon (Riches) and Mopsa (Charles Daniels) has plenty of flirtatious sauciness. Mhairi Lawson's acerbic 'When I have often heard young maids complaining' is feisty rather than melancholic. The Masque of the Seasons in celebration of Oberon's birthday is by turns articulate, relaxed (Rowan Pierce's Spring), bucolic (Budd's high tenor Summer introduced by chuckling oboes), commanding (Roderick Williams's declamatory Winter), and splendid (the trumpet-festooned choruses).

Sampson's heart-rending singing of the Plaint (relocated as an interlude between Acts 4 and 5) is a sublimely attuned dialogue with Christopher Palameta's soulful oboe. Jean-François Madeuf's silver trumpet (without modern vent holes) spars suavely with Budd in 'Thus the gloomy world' (its rapturous middle section recalling humankind's state of innocence is judged perfectly), and also provides a jubilant platform for Lawson's brilliant 'Hark the echoing air'. The Chaconne for the Chinese dancers, repositioned after the final chorus in praise of Hymen, is played with swaying sophistication. Even if a splash more extrovert energy and tauter speeds here and there might have yielded more theatrical fizz, McCreesh's labour of love has abundant nuances and transcendent beauty. **David Vickers**

Wagner

Die Walküre

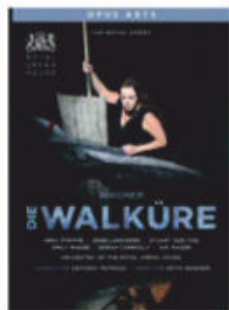
Stuart Skelton *ten*.....Siegmund
Emily Magee *sop*.....Sieglinde
Nina Stemme *sop*.....Brünnhilde
John Lundgren *bar*.....Wotan
Sarah Connolly *mez*.....Fricka
Ain Anger *bass*.....Hunding
Maida Hundeling *sop*.....Helmwige
Lise Davidsen *sop*.....Ortlinde
Kai Rüütel *mez*.....Waltraute
Emma Carrington *mez*.....Rossweisse
Catherine Carby *mez*.....Siegrune
Monika-Evelin Liiv *mez*.....Grimgerde
Claudia Huckle *contr*.....Schwertleite
Orchestra of the Royal Opera House /
Sir Antonio Pappano

Stage director **Keith Warner**

Video director **Jonathan Haswell**

Opus Arte (F) ② DVD OA1308D; (F) Blu-ray OABD7270D
 (4h' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 &
 LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 18 & 28, 2018



The history of performances of Wagner's *Ring* cycle at London's Covent Garden Opera House

has been an enigmatic one. Artistic rosters have been strong, kicking off with Gustav Mahler conducting in 1892 and going on to include famous contemporaries of his (Richter, Mottl) followed on by a line of big names in the 1930s (Bruno Walter, Beecham, Furtwängler). Casts too kept pace with international casting levels (Flagstad, Hotter and Varnay from the 1940s; Nilsson and Windgassen later; then McIntyre, Jones and Tomlinson). Stage productions – copycat and dull in the '50s and '60s – reawoke with the choices of Götz Friedrich and Richard Jones to direct in the '70s and '90s.

Yet, despite a positive rash of 'pirate' recordings from private and radio sources – almost every major conductor's work represented at least in part from the 1936 season through the 1970s – there was a marked scarcity of official releases. Testament's takeover of a 1957 Rudolf Kempe broadcast was a first time for the house in this repertoire on a major label. The present release appears to be the first-ever filming of any of a Covent Garden *Ring* to keep for domestic viewing.

And it is good. The strong cast – surely including two current world leaders in Nina Stemme's Brünnhilde and Stuart Skelton's Siegmund – may be new to this particular staging but, in this most personal and emotional of *The Ring*'s operas, the performers relate as if they've been working together for a lifetime. It helps a deal that three vital operators have been with this cycle all the way since the early 2000s – music director Pappano, stage director Warner and camera director Jonathan Haswell. Although there is always something mind-catching to look at on the late set designer Stefanos Lazaridis's busy stage, this has never been a spectacular or gimmicky *Ring*, more one of thought and depth of detailed text work in the human exchanges. Personally it's Wagner's *King Lear* truly come to life; politically a true saga of the gods battling in vain to hang on to the power and the insights they are finding humans are taking over for themselves.

It took a little time in this cycle's various outings for this feast of ideas to become clear onstage. Various surprises (or directorial interpolations) now find a truer representation: the physical desire Fricka still feels for estranged husband Wotan; the hypnotic power Brünnhilde employs with her fingers to stop Siegmund killing his sister (no melodramatic last-minute sword grab); and the controversial but wonderful full-on father/daughter kiss at the peak of

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the Farewell Scene – now part of a breakdown movingly enacted by John Lundgren’s emotional Wotan. He’s a singing actor who really has the courage to explore the god’s ill luck, even at the expense of appearing weak.

There is some terrific singing along the way: Stemme’s strength of emotion and pinpoint negotiation of vocal intervals, Skelton’s clarity and an increasingly heroic sound, Magee’s sheer focus tapping the same level as her Strauss Kaiserin. These three especially present their text and notes without distracting hysteria. Pappano delivers a further degree of the Rudolf Kempe-like lyricism – nothing overstated but no lack of power or motion where needed – that he found from this cycle’s first *Rheingold* onwards. The orchestral playing is especially sharp and the brass, horns especially, can be proud of their negotiation of Act 1 so early in the day. The filming is above all a triumph of fidelity to the show in front of the cameras and of editing and cutting (from two performances). The sound does it precise justice. ‘Extras’ are a cursory non-event but maybe you can’t have everything. Very warmly recommended, especially if you were ever discouraged by this cycle’s inconsistent press reception. **Mike Ashman**

Weber

Euryanthe

Jacquelyn Wagner *sop*.....Euryanthe
Theresa Kronthaler *mez* Eglantine
Norman Reinhardt *ten*..... Adolar
Andrew Foster-Williams *bass-bar* Lysiart
Stefan Cerny *bass* Ludwig VI

Arnold Schoenberg Choir; ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / Constantin Trinks

Stage director **Christof Loy**

Video director **Paul Landsmann**

Naxos (F) DVD 2 110656; (E) NBD0107V

(167' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTSMA5.1, DTS5.1 &

PCM stereo 8 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna, December 12 & 15, 2018

Includes synopsis



This is the visual side of the CD release I reviewed last November (Capriccio). The control, order and purpose of the production filmed here were predictable from the musical side of the performance: it’s a classic example of the modern minimalist staging that Christof Loy has been perfecting over the years. You’ll only be disappointed if you’re indissolubly wedded to lavish period scenery and

spectacle for this medieval French fiction – and see the disadvantages of over-medieval dressing up, camp and irrelevant, on various YouTube excerpts.

Like much of Loy’s recent work the production is set in a large white room with minimal furniture (Johannes Leiacker is the designer). The cast are dressed formally as if for a modern concert (costumes by Judith Weihrauch) but with obvious reference to their social and dramatic status within the work (the Huntsmen are allowed folkish hats and trousers for their famous Act 3 chorus and Eglantine, as the outsider, a maroon red dress until her intended wedding to Lysiart). Economy throughout is the watchword here.

Exits, entrances and scenery moves are used for major events only – for example, the desolate place at the start of Act 3 where Adolar brings Euryanthe to kill her is effectively suggested by just clearing the room of the bed and piano that were previously there. And, although no monstrous serpent appears to threaten the principals’ lives in this scene, the danger and tension are clearly represented in their acting. Watch also the climax of Eglantine’s and Lysiart’s spooky Act 2 vengeance duet where the two singers end up in a kind of forced erotic heap in the corner, a virtuoso action that perfectly suggests their impromptu alliance.

The end result keeps the audience’s imagination profitably in play and provides uncanny concentration on the drama of Helmina von Chézy’s libretto, here revealed as more psychological drama than action fairy story. The cast and their movements mirror up to their characters – the ‘goodies’ Euryanthe and Adolar tall and fair and more stately, the ‘baddies’ Eglantine and Lysiart shorter and darker and more bendy and flexible.

The filming from two performances in December 2018 is intelligently geared to the staging, balancing well detail and overview. Sound and vision are both in good order. Small cuts include the elimination of two of the minor characters (basically extended chorus solos) but do not damage the impression that, under Constantin Trinks’s well-judged handling of both dynamics and dramatic atmosphere, this is the most approachable and effective *Euryanthe* yet in the current catalogues.

Mike Ashman

Wolf-Ferrari

Die vier Grobiane

Christina Landshamer *sop*.....Lucieta
Susanne Bernhard *sop*Marina
Christine Buffle *sop* Felice
Nathalie Flessa *mez* Young Maid

Zoryana Kushpler *mez*.....Margarita
Markus Francke *ten*.....Filipeto
Uwe Eikötter *ten*..... Conte Riccardo
Peter Schöne *bar*.....Simon
Jürgen Linn *bass-bar* Lunardo
Victor von Halem *bass*.....Maurizio
Friedemann Röhlig *bass*..... Cancian
Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer

CPO (F) (2) CPO555 140-2 (130' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, October 26, 2014

Includes, synopsis, libretto and translation



Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, the son of a glamorous Venetian mother and a

Bavarian artist father, produced several estimable hits during his heyday but fell foul of his dual identity as European nations turned on one another in the First World War. Ulf Schirmer and his Munich orchestra are gradually aiding our reassessment of his output, and follow up their recording of *Le donne curiose* (as *Die neugierigen Frauen*, 9/15) with a fine account of *I quattro rusteghi*, also based on a play by Carlo Goldoni, and also presented in German – the language in which it was premiered in Munich in 1906.

For many it’s Wolf-Ferrari’s masterpiece, and it’s a remarkable score: suffused with easy-going Italianate melody and rhythms, remarkably light on its feet at a time where operatic humour was often somewhat harrumphing. Indeed, the harrumphing is done by the four male ‘curmudgeons’ of the title (the word is not easy to translate), who rail harmlessly about being easily outwitted by the opera’s wily women.

The action revolves around a young couple wanting to see each other ahead of their arranged marriage and are then found out for having been allowed to do so. That couple, Lucieta and Filipeto, have strong echoes of Fenton and Nannetta in Verdi’s *Falstaff*, and indeed there are plenty of echoes of the older composer’s masterpiece in the swift comic rhythm and the patter ensembles (there’s also a hint of David’s music from *Die Meistersinger* when Filipeto first appears). Wolf-Ferrari’s score seamlessly weaves in moments of expansive lyricism (inevitably less memorable than Verdi’s) with considerable skill, and the action is paced expertly.

There’s a lot to enjoy in this performance, too. Christina Landshamer radiates charm as Lucieta and Markus Francke is an ardent, youthful Filipeto. The other women, led by Christine Buffle,



World-leading cast: the Valkyries with John Lundgren as Wotan in the Royal Opera House's gripping *Die Walküre*

are a formidable bunch whose victory against the grumbling but ineffective quartet of teddy-bear-like upholders of the patriarchy (Peter Schöne, Jürgen Linn, Friedemann Röhligh and the veteran Victor von Halem) is always assured. The orchestral playing is fluent and well-turned, and Schirmer keeps everything ticking along beautifully. As a modern account of the score in German to complement Vasily Petrenko's youthful account of the Italian version (Rubicon, 9/18), this can be safely recommended.

Hugo Shirley

'Elle'

Bizet *Carmen* – Quand je vous aimerai ...

L'amour est un oiseau rebelle. Les pêcheurs de perles – Me voilà seule dans la nuit ... Comme autrefois **Debussy** *L'enfant prodigue* – L'année, en vain chasse l'année ... Azaël! Azaël!

G Charpentier *Louise* – Depuis le jour **Gounod**

Faust – Elles ne sont plus là ... Il ne revient pas; Les grands seigneurs ... Ah! Je ris de me voir si belle. *Roméo et Juliette* – Dieu! Quel frisson ...

Amour ranime mon courage; Je veux vivre

Massenet *Le Cid* – De cet affreux combat ...

Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux. *Hérodiade* – Celui dont la parole ... Il est doux, il est bon. *Manon* –

Allons! Il le faut ... Adieu, notre petite table.

Thaïs – Ah, je suis seule ... Dis-moi que je suis

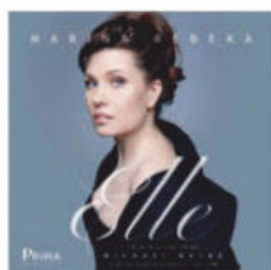
belle; O messenger de Dieu

Marina Rebeka *sop*

St Gallen Symphony Orchestra / Michael Balke

Prima Classic © PRIMA004 (73' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Marina Rebeka turns to French arias for her latest recital, an engaging, if at times

uneven disc, in which both the strengths and occasional weaknesses of her approach are apparent. There's no disputing the quality of the voice itself, evenly produced throughout its range, with a mixture of silk and steel in the tone, and upper registers that blaze quite thrillingly. Her dynamic range and control are often exemplary: there are some exquisitely floated phrases in 'Depuis le jour' from *Louise*, with which the disc opens. We hear less of her coloratura this time around than we do on previous recitals, though her technique remains admirably secure, both in the Jewel Song from Gounod's *Faust* and the Waltz from the same composer's *Roméo et Juliette*.

She's at her best here in moments of grand, tragic passion, when her heroines are in crisis. Thaïs's Act 2 aria is extraordinarily vivid in its terror and panic, though we could do with some of its orchestral postlude rather than abruptly cutting off the music after the climactic final top D. Chimène's 'Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux' from *Le Cid* is all grieving introversion, Gounod's Juliette prepares to drink her sleeping draught with steely, self-willed determination, and Debussy's Lia mourns the absence of her prodigal son

with remarkable intensity: Rebeka is quite superb here, with the cries of 'Azaël! Azaël!' sounding almost as if torn from her.

Yet at the same time, not everything ideally suits her. She's no *Carmen*, and that hint of metal in the voice makes Juliette's Waltz fractionally too fierce, despite the brilliance of her vocalism. The Jewel Song, one notices, is gentler in tone, though her Marguerite only really comes into her own in the much-cut 'Il ne revient pas' from Act 4, where the sadness really registers and there's a huge surge of emotion as she imagines Faust's return. She certainly reminds us, however, that Gounod's heroines, once past their opening display pieces, demand greater dramatic immediacy than we sometimes hear, and she similarly sings Leïla's Act 2 aria from Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* with a darker, weightier tone than we usually encounter, albeit quite beautifully.

Her conductor, as on her recent *Traviata* (5/20), is Michael Balke, who sometimes opts for overly expansive speeds. 'Depuis le jour' works better taken slightly more swiftly, and he dawdles a bit in Manon's 'Adieu, notre petite table'. The playing from the St Gallen Symphony is good, however, with secure and elegant woodwind and brass phrasing, and real warmth and depth in the strings, though the recording itself places the orchestra some way back and Rebeka herself fractionally too far forwards. It's by no means perfect, though you don't want to miss the best of it. **Tim Ashley**

As part of the **20th anniversary celebrations** in 2019, *Songlines* produced a special one-off publication looking at the most iconic moments in world music from 1999-2019. Featuring content spanning the first **150 issues** of *Songlines* magazine, including details of the top album releases, artist news and main events from each year plus the results of the *Songlines* readers' cover poll.



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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Tim Berne's Snakeoil

The Fantastic Mrs 10
Intakt © CD340



For a band that features a good deal of composer/saxophonist Tim Berne's signature methods – knotty, muscular horn and guitar polyphonies bumping off hard-accented staccato rhythms, spacey improv meditations, changing duo dialogues within the ensemble – Snakeoil's five recordings over their eight-year life sound absorbingly different.

The Monk-to-Zappa-like title piece is an instantly arresting example of Berne's stamping, interval-leaping melodic style, its core theme quickly badgered by the brilliant Matt Mitchell's piano chords and Marc Ducret's crunching guitar sounds; clarinetist Oscar Noriega then enters a

more ethereal space in conversation with Ducret, before the band roars back to show just how joyous and exhilarating sharp-end jazz can be. The players' intimate improv exchanges, and the architecture of Berne's taut and provocative ensemble parts, have never been better balanced than on this scalding set. **John Fordham**

Avishai Cohen

Big Vicious
ECM © 2680



The Israeli trumpeter Avishai Cohen charged onto the scene with his invigorating, all-embracing grasp of the 20th century acoustic jazz legacy in his Triveni trio alongside Nasheet Waits and Omer Avital over the last decade. The mood became smokier and more noir-ish for the

2014 release *Dark Nights* and it opened the door to his ECM debut *Into the Silence* a year later; coinciding with his father's death, its tone is altogether more reflective and sombre. On *Big Vicious*, his fourth album for the label, Cohen continues in that vein but with a significant twist; the recording is propelled by a plugged-in, guitar-led rock band. The writing is also a collective effort: 'Fractals' has an ambient-psych, eerie effects-laden ambience – imagine David Lynch producing *In a Silent Way*. Non-originals include a surprisingly effective and faithful reinterpretation of Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata and the band's take on the Massive Attack hit 'Teardrop' pits Cohen's vocal-like soaring Miles-ish sonority against an instrumental sound that's reminiscent of eighties Roxy Music. It can weigh a bit heavy on the gloomy side of things as a whole, but Cohen is always impressively deep. **Selwyn Harris**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Wu Fei & Abigail Washburn

Wu Fei & Abigail Washburn
Smithsonian Folkways Recording © SFW40236



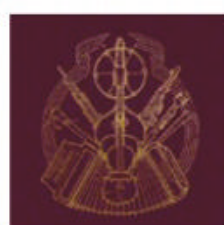
While her husband Béla Fleck has been busily recording with African musicians, Abigail Washburn has forged a productive collaboration with the Chinese singer and guzheng player Wu Fei. The fusion of two very different folk traditions seems natural and unforced, perhaps because both have lived inside each other's cultures.

Empathetically produced by Fleck, bluegrass meets traditional Chinese folk song 'from the hills of Appalachia to the prairies of Xinjian province' as Washburn's banjo and Fei's zither create plangent layers of interwoven stringed magic – one instrumental track is even titled 'Weaving

Medley'. Yet the keening congruence of their two voices is every bit as beguiling, heard at its most transcendent on 'Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song', on which a traditional Scottish tune flows seamlessly into a Manchurian folk song. 'Who Says Women Aren't as Good as Men' reinvents a number from a 1950s Chinese opera written in support of the troops in the Korean war. Gorgeous music to get us through hard times. **Nigel Williamson**

Will Pound

A Day Will Come
Lulubug Records © Lulubug005



Last summer, harmonica and melodeon maestro Will Pound travelled across Europe, physically and musically, to explore what it is. 'The idea,' Pound says, 'was to

discover and celebrate the traditional music of the countries that make up the European Union.' His album comprises tunes from each of the 27 member states, from Finland to Spain, Ireland to Cyprus.

Pound worked with musicians he met on his travels, including the bagpiper Francesco Sultana who taught him one of the few Maltese tunes that still exists. He also gathers an ensemble of fine players from the UK with the range to play this variety of music. Some of the traditions do pose challenges. The Romanian tune, for instance, moves from 4/4 to 7/8 – but he is joined here by percussionist Evelyn Glennie, so they nail it. There is also poetry by Poland's first slam poet, Bohdan Piasecki, now based in Birmingham, who chronicles a personal migration. This is a heartfelt celebration and a timely reminder of connections that, through traditional music, span the continent of Europe. **Julian May**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Claudio Abbado in Vienna

Peter Quantrill reassesses the Italian conductor's complete VPO recordings for DG

There stands a grandfather clock in the corner of the room where *Mélisande* lies dying as the curtain rises on the last act of Debussy's opera. In most recordings, the clock chimes on the off-beat, where the rhythm is not too slack for one to hear it as a clock at all, and even in the classic Désormière account of 1941, the clock is just a clock. With tiny adjustments to the rise and fall of its chime, however, Claudio Abbado brings the clock to life; no longer mechanical accompanist but silent witness to the hopeless tragedy playing out. He was not the first conductor to underline the Parsifalian tread of the string parts and their sudden access to transcendence in the following dialogue between Golaud and the doctor, but he did so gently, without importing the associations of Wagnerian downfall, transforming them just as Debussy did in the score, though with a Ravellian attention to the real rather than the numinous.

On his day Abbado could evoke such moments of heightened naturalism like no one else, and within this box are enough such days to fill a month of rewarding listening. I'm thinking of the *Sanctus* in Schubert's late E flat major Mass: Mackerras and Harnoncourt also mould the phrasing in waves, like the beating of angels' wings, but only Abbado imparts a small but telling urgency to the tempo and the bass line within a few bars, summoning serenity and terror within seconds, via the choral response of awe. Then the gentle bounce of bow on string to lead the soldiers out of the barracks as they line up for the *Emperor Waltz* at the 1991 New Year's Day concert, the strut of their march giving way to an almost Mahlerian nostalgia about the cello solo to launch the waltz itself, the mingled pride and giddiness of the march and waltz combined, like the panoptic narrative of Joseph Roth's novel *Radetzky March* retold in 10 minutes.

People and places belong to all these pieces, but Abbado often told compelling stories within even apparently 'abstract' symphonic narratives. The story of this Viennese box itself begins in April 1966, with the Seventh Symphony by Beethoven recorded in brilliant, brassy Decca sound, eminently comparable to the same orchestra in the same piece for the same label seven years earlier under Georg Solti in between sessions for *Das Rheingold*. The album – Abbado's first of any consequence after some Fonit Cetra sessions of Baroque repertoire in the early '60s (reissued within a no less compelling RCA/Sony box, 10/14) – came about after his debut with the VPO at the previous year's Salzburg Festival. Invited by Karajan, he led them in a young man's Mahler *Resurrection* of headlong passion, deserving attention well beyond its limited circulation on Italian pirate labels, hardly less lapel-grabbing or score-aware than the 1971 Ninth that marked the marriage of Bernstein with Mahler and the Viennese.

Abbado could evoke moments of heightened naturalism like no one else

'This is a disappointment', declared Edward Greenfield of that Beethoven Seventh (1/67), and he took both conductor and orchestra to task over untidy ensemble. Listening now, I incline rather to Robert Layton's May '67 Quarterly Retrospective viewpoint – aren't those chords in the introduction carefully spread upwards rather than slapdash? – that 'the naturalness and unaffectedly musical qualities of Mr Abbado's direction' more than compensate for marginal imprecisions. Better still, from the following year, is the Eighth, the edgy, telegrammatic nature of which perhaps spoke to Abbado more

directly than several other Beethoven symphonies. At any rate, he elicits from the Viennese a blazing momentum that reminds me of Furtwängler's Salzburg farewell with the symphony, and the orchestra, 14 years earlier.

Though he led them often enough at subscription concerts, Abbado and the VPO made too few recordings during the 1970s, the most inspired of them being Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Sixth symphonies, benefiting from DG's more hands-off engineering, and the least successful ('worst' hardly comes into it) being two albums of golden-period Mozart concertos with Abbado's piano professor from his student days in Salzburg, Friedrich Gulda. The teacher seems inclined to rein in his improvisational instincts, as if not to lead his pupil astray, and the accompaniment is accordingly dutiful. A soloist much more on Abbado's wavelength was his friend and contemporary Maurizio Pollini, and their 1976 account of Brahms's Second Concerto still holds more heat than the immaculate cut of their Berlin remake together.

My sentimental reasons for preferring Abbado's Philips-made account of the concerto with Brendel stem from formative experiences in the arena of the Royal Albert Hall, where the conductor's Proms were red-letter days throughout the '90s. After his appointment as their Principal Conductor in 1979, however, LSO players quickly ran up against his inscrutable rehearsal technique, and there was truth to the complaint that he tended to conduct them in repertoire which he would then record with more prestige elsewhere. Listening to broadcasts of their 1984 Beethoven cycle at the Royal Festival Hall, one understands why Abbado and DG took it to Vienna instead, but it's unfortunate with hindsight that the chronological focus of the box falls on a period in the '80s when



Claudio Abbado: a teller of compelling stories

Abbado, outside the opera pit, had distanced himself from the Furtwängler-idolising firebrand of his early career and was searching for a distinct identity in symphonic repertoire. Too few recordings in the box, whether made live or in studio conditions, are charged with the electricity of the *Simon Boccanegra* which marked his local opera debut in 1984, once issued by RCA within a 'Wiener Staatsoper Live' edition (2/99). For all their live provenance, Mahler slow movements (Nos 3, 4 and 9) hang fire, especially in comparison with the otherworldly beauties of his Lucerne Festival concerts; the standalone *Adagio* of the Tenth suffers from surprisingly approximate playing and some glaring edits.

The Second Viennese School composers, however, brought the very best out of orchestra and conductor together. Some particular meeting of head and heart in the Italian intellectual school of music-making – Bruno Maderna was also a superb conductor of Berg, though without the benefit of DG's precision engineering and the VPO strings at their silkiest – finds a home in the tightly strung passions of the *Orchestral Pieces* by Berg and Webern. Despite a less than ingratiating Tove, the *Gurrelieder* in this box is still unmatched for opulence and ecstasy, a decade on from the Collection article that placed it top of the pile (3/10). The performance

as recorded took place in May 1992, just months after Abbado's abrupt departure from the Staatsoper after a falling-out with the Intendant, Ioan Holender – an episode passed over by the skimpy booklet notes – but there is no sign of underlying tension here or in many of the recordings from the early '90s, including a Verdi Requiem kindled by arresting detail and a top-class team of soloists (Studer/Lipovšek/Carreras/Raimondi) audibly plugged in to the conductor's vision of the piece as opera manqué.

Abbado's association with the orchestra ended in 1997 – he never returned after his partial recovery from cancer in the early years of the present century – and Clemens Hellsberg's note refers to the 'tragic aspect' of their relationship. The art of the unrepeatable is by nature tragic, and there is a melancholy genius to most of the operatic recordings here that puts me in mind of another modernist, perfectionist Italian, the painter Giorgio Morandi, who died the year before Abbado's Salzburg debut. Perhaps the demands of time and resources he made – quietly, firmly – were unsustainable, requiring *Tristan* and *Parsifal* to be put on by others without rehearsal, but they produced a *Wozzeck*, *Khovanshchina* and *Pelléas* which left nothing to chance yet remained unstudied by routine, alive with real characters and dilemmas in the way of a Morandi still life.

In fact, the inclusion of a DVD section would have much enhanced the attractiveness of this box – not only the filmed Staatsoper productions or the telecasts of Bruckner's Fourth and the two New Year's Day concerts but also Hugo Käch's studio film of Beethoven's Eighth, recorded at much the same time as the Decca sessions, visually related to the director's work with Karajan but without the unremitting maestro-centrism. As it is, the last recordings in the box are largely devoted to Abbado's late-flowering love of Bruckner, from the Fourth in 1990 to the First and Ninth in 1996. While he never quite created the illusion of letting the long outer movements flow as if by themselves, in the manner of Wand or Giulini, Abbado brought other, often overlooked qualities to the

symphonies, more frequently explored in his wake, such as songfulness without undue simplicity: there's no mud on the boots of Abbado's Bruckner. Instead, in the *Adagio* of the Ninth and the finales of the Fourth and Fifth, he gathered the musicians around him in a counterpoint that gives each voice and each musician their due rather than amassing them in the service of some higher power – another unlikely outlet for the aristocratic strain of Italian socialism that informed his music-making from an early stage. Like Zubin Mehta, his fellow student in Hans Swarowsky's conducting class, he understood how the Viennese respond best to complete authority and its almost invisible exercise. **G**

THE RECORDING

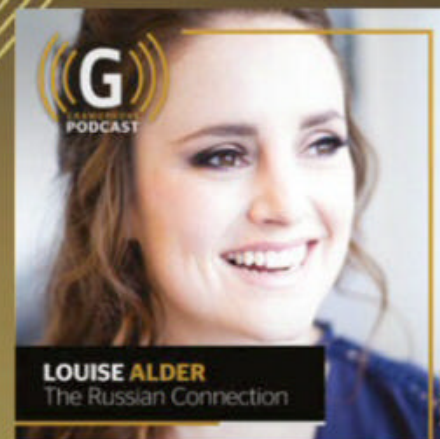
Claudio Abbado & Wiener Philharmoniker
The Complete Deutsche Grammophon
Recordings DG © (58 discs) 483 7784





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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan revisits some recent collections, ranging from Baroque to Romantic and beyond

Herbert von Karajan's Decca sojourn, which mostly involved the Vienna Philharmonic, found the great conductor in the charge of a wonderful engineering team. Indeed, it was a heaven-made marriage that bore some remarkable productions. What we have with this particular set of recordings isn't so much a 'Karajan's Vienna or Berlin Philharmonic' focus as a 'Karajan conducts the Vienna Philharmonic, etc', the emphasis being very much on the orchestras and Karajan's command of them, rather than a specific 'Karajan sound'. The 1959 VPO Beethoven Seventh (Vienna Sofiensaal), for example, is both taut and weighty; but turn to the sleek 1962 DG Jesus-Christus-Kirche Berlin Philharmonic remake and there are some significant differences, the most obvious being at the start of the *Allegretto*, in the way that the notes are glued together, whereas in Vienna they're clearly separated. It's interesting, too, that at the start of the finale's development section in the VPO/Decca Mozart G minor Symphony there are hints of the rhetorical hesitations favoured by Harnoncourt, whereas the subsequent BPO/DG recording is relatively straightforward. Karajan's Richard Strauss tends towards drama and warmth of texture: *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Also sprach Zarathustra* are masterfully done. As for *The Planets*, menace and mystery are equally present, and I've rarely heard a lighter, more joyous 'Jupiter'. Dvořák, Brahms, Johann Strauss II, Josef Strauss (a red-blooded *Delirien*) and Adam are moulded with care, and so is some of the featured Tchaikovsky, though *Romeo and Juliet*, despite being well played, lacks tension. And opera? *Le nozze di Figaro* features Frederica von Stade as an unforgettable Cherubino, Rimsky-Korsakov's take on Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (Nicolai Ghiaurov in the title-role) sounds thoroughly compelling, and Karajan's romantically nuanced way with *Carmen* is much enhanced by the presence of Leontyne Price, Franco Corelli and Robert Merrill. Price is equally charismatic as Tosca (Karajan here is at his most imposing), and there are the other Puccini classics, *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*, both with Mirella Freni and Luciano Pavarotti (*La bohème* alone here is with the Berlin Philharmonic), not to mention celebrated recordings of *Aida*, *Otello* and *Die Fledermaus*, the last complete with its



bonus gala where various great singers let their hair down. For me, viewed overall, these are among Karajan's finest hours on disc, and the remastering is very well done.

Turning next to another of Brilliant Classics' generous 'starter packs', 25 discs' worth of **Baroque** material is distinctive from the off, with oboe concertos from Albinoni's Op 9 beautifully played by Stefan Schilli. There are genially performed, well-recorded *Brandenburg Concertos* under Pieter-Jan Belder (who also takes care of Corelli's Op 6) and Bach violin concertos with the Amsterdam Bach Soloists led with a light and flexible touch by Thomas Zehetmair, as well as stylish performances of various works by Couperin, Handel, Locatelli, Marcello, Purcell, G and GB Sammartini, A Scarlatti, Stradella, Telemann and Vivaldi.

Another valuable CD overview arrives care of Etcetera, which has boxed **Schubert's** complete works for four hands as performed on a fortepiano by the musical partnership of Jan Vermeulen and Veerle Peeters, with the sort of musical sensitivity that the best of these wonderful pieces thrive on. Most impressive is the highly dramatic A minor duo *Lebensstürme*, which is played with its long repeat (many versions omit it); and come the haunting second idea (1'39"), the instrument's tone becomes more veiled. I don't recall an alternative, on either modern or period instruments, that is more impressive. Other highlights include the quasi-symphonic *Grand Duo*, thought to be a draft of the missing so-called *Gastein* Symphony of 1824; the lightly assertive Six Polonaises, D824, played here with real flare and a winning lilt; and of course the great F minor Fantasy, forcefully articulated by these players – which isn't to say that the more reflective moments want for poetic intensity.

Like the best of Schubert's keyboard duo repertory, **Rued Langgaard's** boldly outreaching string quartets draw you in

with a range of invention that is at times quite dazzling. Denmark's maverick master is already celebrated for his remarkably original symphonies but the quartets are also striking – very approachable, too. (Though forget Carl Nielsen as a plausible point of reference – chalk and cheese, I'd say.) The second disc of Dacapo's revelatory three-disc set featuring the Nightingale Quartet opens with the premiere recording of *Rose Garden Play* (1918), the sort of pensive, thoughtfully oscillating music that we might otherwise associate with Frank Bridge. The second movement, 'Mozart', approximates a Mendelssohn scherzo, whereas the finale, 'Rococo', is more intense. The A flat Quartet has a strong tonal identity that immediately marks out a relationship with such classical masters as Beethoven, but elsewhere – in the Second Quartet, *Storm Clouds Receding*, for example – I sense a distant kinship (probably accidental) with Smetana, Janáček, even Romantic early works by members of the Second Viennese School. There are 10 works in all, the last of them (a little *Italian Scherzo*) dating from 1950, two years before Langgaard's death. And where to start? Probably with the Variations that close the first disc. I have to confess that prior to being sent this set I hadn't heard the cycle as a whole, but discovering its range of expression and frequent beauty has proved a great source of pleasure, especially in such winning performances – all of them superbly recorded. Excellent annotations, too. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

The Complete Decca Recordings

Herbert von Karajan

Decca © (33 CDs) 483 4903

Baroque Various artists

Brilliant © (25 discs) 95886

Schubert Vermeulen, Peeters

Etcetera © ⑦ KTC1511

Langgaard Nightingale Quartet

Dacapo ® ③ 6 200004

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Rediscovering Paul van Kempen

With any luck, by the time you read this feature on the Dutch conductor Paul van Kempen, Eloquence's 10-CD set of his Philips, DG and Decca sessions will be back in stock. The initial reaction to its issue was so enthusiastic that the set soon sold out, and no wonder. Various of these recordings were previously available as part of Philips's long-defunct The Early Years series but the current collection is superior in all respects, a masterpiece of careful planning, in fact.

Van Kempen was certainly controversial. Though born in the Netherlands, he became a German citizen in 1932. From 1934 to 1942 he was principal conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic, then in 1942 he succeeded Herbert von Karajan as Kapellmeister in Aachen, where he stayed until 1944. In 1949 he returned to the Netherlands as principal conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, but the fact that he had conducted concerts for the *Wehrmacht* caused him major problems such as hurled stink bombs and walkouts.

'A pocket-sized Mengelberg' is how Bernard Haitink once described Van Kempen, and there are many major similarities between the two conductors' styles, especially in the music of Tchaikovsky. The one Mengelbergian fingerprint that doesn't turn up on these Van Kempen recordings, at least not for the most part, is the liking for the swooping portamentos that were such a prominent aspect of the elder conductor's style. On the other hand, Van Kempen (also with the Concertgebouw Orchestra) made free with the musical texts, adding timpani beats in the slow movement of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, cutting the work's finale and putting in cymbal crashes towards the end, and in the *Capriccio italien* extending that freedom in multiple directions. Still, forgiveness is easy in the rush of so much red-blooded excitement (and there's plenty of that), and when it comes to the *Pathétique*, Van Kempen plays it relatively straight, offering a magnificent performance, save that the strings at the beginning of the third movement are rather too loud. *Romeo*



'Controversial': the Dutch conductor Paul Van Kempen, who became a German citizen in 1932, is represented across 10 Eloquence CDs

and *Juliet* is just as impressive, with whiplash orchestral attack for the duel scenes and maximum ardour in the love music, where Van Kempen is easily Mengelberg's match and, of course, far better recorded. Other Tchaikovsky items with the Concertgebouw Orchestra include a sturdy *1812 Overture* and a *Marche slave* that is thrilling beyond belief, although at 4'27" there's a strange momentary pause. As it comes roughly at the halfway point in the piece, I wonder whether it is there to facilitate the turn-over point on a seven-inch vinyl or even shellac release. Doubtful, I would have thought – more a characteristically dramatic pause for breath. The Tchaikovsky recordings with the Lamoureux Orchestra are of the *Mozartiana* Suite and Serenade for Strings, where the first movement

is at several points uncomfortably rushed.

Among the sessions with the Netherlands Radio PO, Tansman's *Isaïe le prophète* (1950) – a moving commemoration of the Shoah and tribute to the founding of the State of Israel, roughly speaking a stylistic cross between the Stravinsky of the *Symphony of Psalms* and Bloch's roughly contemporaneous *Sacred Service* – is given with maximum intensity and has the benefit of a superb tenor soloist in Cornelis Kalkman. Also from the Netherlands, there's a sequence of orchestral pieces from operas and arias involving local opera singers soprano Gré Brouwenstijn, tenor Frans Vroons and baritone Theo Baylé. The other major choral work here is Verdi's Requiem, where the 'middle voice' soloists are surely the best: contralto Maria von Ilosvay and tenor Petre Munteanu (whose 'Ingemisco' is among the most beautiful I've heard). The soprano is Brouwenstijn and the bass Oskar Czerwenka, with the

choral and orchestral forces of the National Academy of Santa Cecilia. The performance is often impressive: the telling diminuendo at the dramatic start of 'Rex tremendae', say; and elsewhere, the way that Van Kempen maintains a palpable tension.

Van Kempen's Berlin Philharmonic legacy includes what are arguably his finest recordings, certainly two of his own personal favourites. Beethoven is represented by an *Eroica* that is truly among the greatest of the period – of any period, I'd say. Weighty, forceful, never pulling its punches yet never landing them prematurely, it includes one of the most overwhelming accounts of the *Marcia funebre* that you're ever likely to encounter. Symphonies Nos 7 and 8, although very good, aren't quite so

memorable, but the other treasure from Berlin is what is still surely the wittiest, most alert and best-played version ever released of Reger's endlessly fascinating *Hiller Variations*. Other featured items include a selection of *Hungarian Dances* by Brahms and some shorter orchestral works, mostly played with a certain frisson and sense of style. The highlights, though, lie elsewhere, testimony to a genuinely great conductor who up until now has rarely been acknowledged as such. I would hope that all that will now change, thanks to the ever enterprising Cyrus Meher-Homji and his Eloquence team. The superb booklet notes are by Niek Nelissen. So what next from Eloquence? For starters, a shellac-derived classic such as Dvořák's Violin Concerto with Váša Příhoda, perhaps?

THE RECORDING



Paul van Kempen: 
Complete Philips Recordings
 Netherlands Radio PO;
 Concertgebouw Orchestra et al
 Eloquence © 10 ELQ484 0237

Toscanini's fiery Schumann

I can recall years ago travelling to meet up with a fellow reviewer armed with my favourite Arturo Toscanini CDs, hoping to achieve a convert to the maestro's cause. One such recording was the 1949 NBC Schumann *Rhenish* reissued here (originally on RCA), a performance I've always loved for the sweep of its first movement and its boisterous finale. My colleague hated it, so much so that I soon began to hear what he was hearing/hating – in other words, its over-forcefulness, even aggression, and unpalatably hard tone. Only now, listening to this superb Pristine Audio mastering, do I realise that what he was probably listening to wasn't so much the performance as the original sound. As 'aired' by Pristine, the performance's singing qualities that I so valued then (and still do value) are made newly manifest, unhampered by cramped recorded sound. It is a great performance, uncharacteristic in its expansiveness, even weight.

The 1946 account of Symphony No 2 has a predecessor from 1941 (available as part of a complete NBC SO concert – Naxos, 8/00) – a similar reading but with a marginally swifter account of the wonderful *Adagio espressivo*. Also, the earlier version has some audience noise near the beginning of the symphony. But, in general, inflections are keener in 1941, and the orchestral playing marginally tidier. Both performances feature minor tweaks in orchestration but nothing startles the ear

unduly. The general thrust of Toscanini's Schumann is very expressive: lean, fast, fiery and notably un-Germanic, much like a lot of his Wagner – and if you're partial to that, you're bound to respond well to what's on offer here.

THE RECORDING



Schumann Syms Nos 2 & 3
 NBC Symphony Orchestra /
 Arturo Toscanini
 Pristine Audio © PASC584

Stokowski the pioneer

Of the various conductors invited to conduct Toscanini's orchestra, Leopold Stokowski was more likely than most to push the boat out with unusual repertoire. The latest to arrive on CD is a programme that opens with the exotic First (or *Exile*) Symphony by Hovhanness, a work that was premiered within these shores in 1939 under Leslie Heward. Stokowski secures a compelling performance, the first movement a hypnotic 'Lament' with dramatic interjections, the second movement, 'Conflict' (which was later replaced), featuring impressive writing for wind and brass, the third – and most memorable – movement, 'Triumph', climaxing to a noble chorale theme underpinned by rushing figurations in the strings. The playing of the NBC SO is remarkably assured and the 1942 recording captures the performance with considerable presence. The programme's other highlight is Hindemith's Symphony in E flat of 1940, the composer's first composition created in the US – exceptionally bold music, whether in the triumphant mood of the outer movements, the relative solemnity of the second or the mischievous cavorting of the Scherzo. Stokowski in 1943 secures a performance that suggests he had been conducting the work for years, such is the confidence and fervour of the playing. Also from 1943 is Stravinsky's Symphony in C, which is not quite such a happy story, especially in the first movement where the orchestra occasionally sounds unsure of its ground. Some of the rest is better; but Stokowski was more convincing with the primary colours of the composer's early ballets, especially *Petrushka* (most notably with his own orchestra in 1950, on Testament) and a suite from *The Firebird*. For the Symphony in C, Stravinsky's two recordings are probably your best bet. Still, the Hovhanness and Hindemith items make this CD pretty well unmissable. Stokowski guru Edward Johnson provides concise annotation.

THE RECORDING



Stokowski Conducts
20th Century Symphonies
 NBC Symphony Orchestra
 Pristine Audio © PASC587

Another instalment of the complete Kreisler

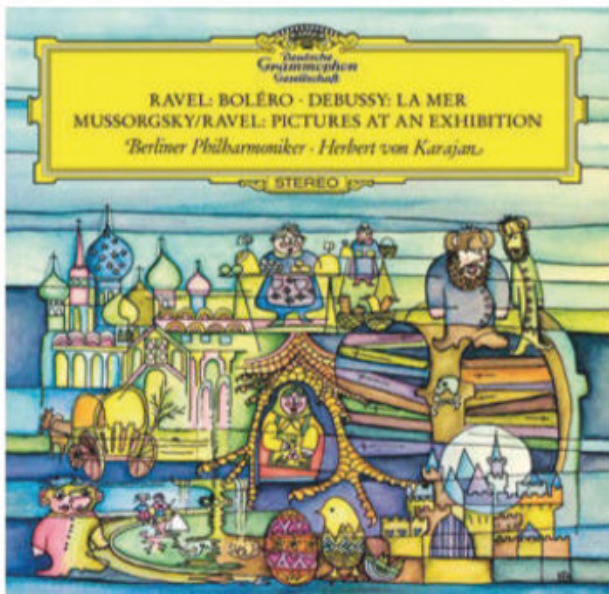
One of the glories of the early RCA 'historical' CD catalogue was its 11-CD set 'Fritz Kreisler: The Complete RCA Recordings' in Ward Marston's superb transfers (RCA, 5/96), and for the Kreisler 'Complete Recordings' on Naxos (being mostly short pieces, which were preceded by five CDs of concertos transferred by Mark Obert-Thorn) he has again done a remarkable job. Mind you, Kreisler's violin evidently loved the microphone (much as Mischa Elman's did), and it even loved the acoustic recording horn, so the transfer engineer's principal tasks are to secure clean copies, establish correct pitches and make sure that Kreisler's signature warmth of tone comes across unimpeded. Needless to say, Marston delivers on all fronts. As to Kreisler's style, its consistent vibrancy, poise and 'gentlemanliness', its wit and honesty, all usher you into the presence of an artist who invariably makes you smile, even occasionally shed a tear (the wonderful *Andante alla zingaresca* from *Ruralia hungarica* by Dohnányi on track 13). The play of Kreisler's bow and left hand, seemingly so effortless, is most apparent in his own *Gypsy Caprice*, whereas Dvořák's wistful Humoresque No 7 is made all the mellower by Kreisler's telling use of portamento. As to charm, you could hardly do better than go straight to his own *Syncopation* or *Marche miniature viennoise* with his brother Hugo playing the cello and Michael Raucheisen at the piano (tracks 8 and 9, respectively). And there are the alternative takes, of Massenet's *Thaïs Meditation* in this instance, where minor differences of inflection or emphasis, although far from obvious, do make a difference (the second version is perhaps marginally more secure). With excellent notes by Tully Potter, this latest volume of an important series has much to recommend it.

THE RECORDING



Fritz Kreisler: The Complete Recordings, Vol 9
 with Hugo Kreisler, Carl Lamson,
 Michael Raucheisen *pfs*
 Naxos © 8 111410

Classics RECONSIDERED



Rob Cowan and Andrew Farach-Colton tune in to Debussy's *La mer* in the 1964 DG recording from Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic



Debussy

La mer

Berlin PO / Herbert von Karajan

DG

Gone are the days when maestri had their national specialities – Walter his Mahler, Furtwängler his Reger ... Herbert von Karajan, as one would expect from Mr Robbins Landon's recent profile of him in *The Gramophone*, is one up on all this. Equally at home in musical Vienna, Berlin, Milan and London, he has never concealed his passion for French music. It was inevitable that he should record some

Debussy ... and his interpretations are impossible to fault ... *La mer*, calm or tempestuous, is as superbly delineated as Hokusai's 'Wave'. The recording, like the performance, is of the highest quality.

Felix Aprahamian (3/65)

Here are examples of 'The Karajan Effect' at its most positive, and sounding, in these new transfers, fractionally more open, focused and fresh than before, with the billowing bass moderated and the dynamic range extended. Along with Karajan's own imaginative deployment of orchestral

colour ... the Berlin Jesus-Christus Kirche acoustics of these 1964-66 recordings add their own wonderful coloration and atmosphere ...

But how does one do justice to this *La mer* in a single sentence? Well, you can either be seduced by some of the most sheerly beautiful orchestral sound ever recorded, or appreciate it for its wide-ranging imagery and its properly mobile pacing; but whichever way you look at it, it is one of the great recorded *La mers* and one of the classics of the gramophone.

Jonathan Swain (12/95)

Rob Cowan How do you experience waves, Andrew? Like a quietly observant Hokusai and *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, or like Turner, trapped mid-ocean, with his *Waves Breaking against the Wind*? For me, Karajan's first Berlin *La mer* brings Hokusai to mind (as it did for Felix Aprahamian back in March 1965), with every droplet painstakingly etched and a sense of movement for sure, but where the elements are conspicuous by their relative absence. Having turned away from Walter Legge's smoothing plane at the Philharmonia, Karajan here embraces an even more sensual beauty, but in doing so leaves Debussy all at sea – in quite the wrong sense. 'Superbly delineated' is how Aprahamian put it. Alas, for me that's half the problem. I need to escape from behind the double glazing and get out there, risking life and limb to feel the sea the way Debussy evidently felt it. What this *La mer* lacks is what it most needs: a sense of danger.

Andrew Farach-Colton Having immersed myself in your *Gramophone* Collection (9/18), Rob, I knew that we'd be coming to this *La mer* from opposite shores. I'll agree

that Karajan takes pains to achieve crystalline textures, and I'd argue that, more often than not, he succeeds. As for the painting analogies, while I wouldn't describe his manner as, say, Turneresque, I do think Hokusai is too stylised for a reference point. That famous, frothy *Great Wave* seems frozen in mid-crash, and one thing that strikes me about this performance in particular is its sense of momentum. Indeed, the 1953 Philharmonia version you mention seems relaxed, almost leisurely, by comparison, and the less said about his soggy digital account from the mid-1980s, the better.

RC I agree that you could push the Hokusai parallels too far, though the painter's genius is in focusing that 'mid-crash' while allowing its 'fall' soon afterwards to pre-echo in your imagination. It's interesting that with the more genial Philharmonia version Karajan seems at pains to capture the playful maritime moment rather than to fuss endlessly over how his players sound. 'We're having fun' is what he implies, or appears to imply, in London, whereas in Berlin the directive

is more obviously to lay his freshly honed stylistic cards on the table. You may not agree that they're all entirely appropriate, especially for this work, but even more than the first Karajan-BPO Beethoven symphony cycle, *La mer* suggests a pristine horizon shimmering at dawn.

AF-C Yes, in both EMI recordings – the aforementioned one in London and the 1977 Berlin revisit – Karajan seems to be more concerned with atmosphere. One can hear this even in tiny details, like the Philharmonia horns at 1'53" in the first movement, so mysteriously distant and muted; I'll admit there's nothing quite so strikingly characterful in this DG performance. That said, I see Karajan's focus in 1964 being as much on structural matters as on technical finesse. 'Jeux de vagues', for example, sounds marvellously organic to me. Its propulsion isn't that far from Piero Coppola's 1932 recording. Karajan handles the transitions so deftly, and I love how underneath that foamy, sparkly spray, he suggests the long pull of an undercurrent in the (Rimsky-Korsakov-like) lyricism that emerges around 3'55".



Dividing opinion: is Karajan's 1964 Berlin account too 'safe' or does it achieve that perfect symphonic arc?

RC 'Jeux de vagues' is, I think, my favourite segment of the work, 'the long pull of an undercurrent' (as you vividly suggest) one of its most original aspects: pure movement in sound, which is what makes *La mer* forever new. The year before Karajan set down his 1964 version, George Szell recorded the work with the Cleveland Orchestra for Columbia. Follow him and his Clevelanders from that same point and the sense of deep-water aquatic activity nervously pursued matches Karajan's skyborne spray, with amazingly accurate playing, a bold, horn-topped climax and, most important, vivid premonitions of that storm to come. With most conductors those auguries don't arrive until the 'Dialogue du vent et de la mer' begins.

AF-C You're absolutely right, Rob. Szell elicits vivid and unusually articulate playing from the Clevelanders. Strange, isn't it, that he didn't record more Debussy? I would say, though, that he's just as punctilious about sound as Karajan, if not more so. Indeed, I find Szell's attention to detail sometimes accentuates the episodic quality of the music, and

what fascinates me about Karajan is that he sustains an arc. Perhaps it's this emphasis on the 'symphonic' aspect of *La mer* over the graphically pictorial that disappoints you?


RC *La mer*'s descriptive subtitle 'three symphonic sketches' seems to cover many options, from Mark Elder's revealing immediacy to the cinematic extremes of Leopold Stokowski. Even after having prepared a *Gramophone* Collection, I return to *La mer* with renewed wonder at just how much variety each recording can deliver. And yet now, as before, I sense something overly prepared about Karajan in 1964, quite different from his bigger, bolder, more elemental 1977 BPO remake. Abbado's magnificent live Lucerne Festival version (2003) narrates the whole story with winning flexibility, from delicate filigree to nuanced expressiveness, always attending to minutiae though never indulging the moment at the expense of the whole. As he once said to me, 'If you notice a detail even in context, it's already too much.' With Szell, the fact that

detail is audible everywhere establishes a level playing field, whereas Karajan's bejewelled arc, though seductive to the ear, is a distraction.

AF-C Hmm. So often I find our musical values and tastes quite closely aligned, Rob, so I'm really trying hard to hear through your ears, as it were. Now, to be clear, I wouldn't place any of Karajan's recordings of *La mer* anywhere near the top of the heap, but I do find this 1964 account to be the best of the lot by far. His 1977 version seems more self-consciously sculpted and often disconcertingly grandiose. Perhaps, as you say, it's more atmospheric, but this comes at the expense of a kind of joyousness (I'll admit, not a word I usually use in describing Karajan's performances). But in 1964, I sense not only his delight in the Berliners' legerdemain but also his love for the music itself (he did record it four times, after all). Indeed, there's nothing studio-bound about it – the third movement thrillingly conveys the frisson of a live performance without being overwrought (listen, say, starting at 5'18").

RC I suppose the problem with me, Andrew, is that since first encountering our featured recording (which I did respond to fairly positively many moons ago), later rivals have extended the story, and I'm not referring only to their (occasionally) superior sound. You mention the Berliners' legerdemain, their sleight of hand you might also call it, but that to me more concerns sea surface than sea swell. You concede that Karajan 1977 is, whatever its perceived shortcomings, more atmospheric, and I suppose that that is what draws me towards it. It perhaps 'ticks fewer boxes', overall, than its predecessor, but its many strengths win the day, for me at least. Then again, 'top of the heap' for either version? Nowhere near.

AF-C I suppose I'm fascinated by *La mer*'s dual nature as tone poem and symphonic essay, and in this DG recording I hear Karajan finding a balance between the two. But I'll take your point about atmosphere. Oddly enough, one of the most solidly symphonic versions I know is also among the most vividly atmospheric: Roger Désormière's with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in 1950. Although it was recorded 70 years ago in relatively dim mono, listening to it, I feel the ocean's salt and spray as well as an emotionally overwhelming sense of its vast majesty.

RC Now you're talking! 

Books



David Vickers welcomes a useful guide to Telemann's life and music:

'Steven Zohn's lucid prose balances perceptive thumbnail views of biography, context and broad assessments of musical features'



Rob Cowan admires a magisterial survey of music under Nazi rule:

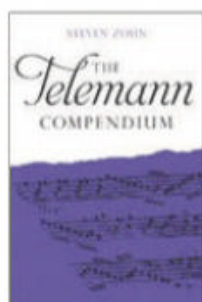
'The great Czech conductor Václav Talich gratefully secured sponsorship from Joseph Goebbels for concerts in Berlin and Dresden'

The Telemann Compendium

By Steven Zohn

Boydell Press, HB, 304pp, £55

ISBN 978-1-78327-446-8



Telemann's longevity, fecund imagination and lifelong curiosity mean that there is no such thing as 'typical' music by him. More than 3000 works survive, including about 125 orchestral suites, 125 concertos, dozens of other orchestral works and sonatas for five or more instruments, just under 40 quartets, 130 trios, nearly 170 other small-scale instrumental pieces, more than 240 keyboard pieces, 1400 church cantatas including 13 more or less intact annual cycles (another 300 are lost), more than 20 liturgical Passions, five non-liturgical Passion oratorios, at least 16 other oratorios of different kinds and nine complete operas (more than 40 others are lost to varying degrees).

Steven Zohn's lucid prose balances perceptive thumbnail views of historical biography, context and broad assessments of musical features. Distilling a vast corpus of up-to-date specialist research, Telemann's career, personality, output, versatility and hobbies are set out in a 15-page biography. This is followed by a dictionary covering assorted topics, including each of the extant operas and several that are partly lost, a smattering of the most important oratorios, and major printed collections such as *Harmonischer Gottesdienst* (1725–27), *Musique de table* (1733; there is also a separate discussion of other 'Tafelmusik'), and both sets of Paris Quartets (1730 and 1738). There are illuminating overviews of genres such as cantatas (annual cycles with specific concepts or identities receive their own succinct entries), concertos, instrumental duets, fantasias, funeral music, *Kapitänsmusik* (oratorio and serenata pairings for annual celebrations of



Telemann and his music are treated to a lucid guide by Steven Zohn

Hamburg's militia captains), keyboard music, Masses, motets, operas, oratorios (including Passions), overture-suite (with separate entries on a few of the best-known) and songs. Extant works not namechecked anywhere in the A-Z are at least represented in an epic new work-list that is well over 100 pages (about a third of the book).

There are brief guides to Telemann's 'Late style' and 'Mixed Taste' – the fusing together of Italian, French and German styles, into which he also added rustic Polish folk idioms (a subject given its own separate discussion). His close affinity for certain instruments is summarised in entries on calchedon (a six-string bass lute), chalumeau (forebear of the clarinet), flute, oboe (and oboe d'amore), recorder, viola and viola da gamba. There is a short discussion on performance practice: several

of Telemann's publications contain information on ornamentation (three collections of Methodical sonatas) and continuo realisation from figured bass. The entry on 'Choir' reveals fascinating evidence that an essential core of four concertists were supplemented whenever possible by four doubling ripienists in chorales and choruses in both Frankfurt and Hamburg.

Telemann's friendships, reciprocal influences or connections with other leading musicians are

explained – not only Bach and Handel (whom I doubt needed to visit Hamburg in 1729 to recruit the bass Reimschneider for the King's Theatre), but also his godson (and successor) Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, leading Hamburg figures Keiser and Mattheson, Dresden court musicians Pisendel and Zelenka, Leipzig alumni Fasch and Graupner, Berlin-based Graun and Quantz, the Italians Albinoni, Corelli, Benedetto Marcello and Vivaldi, and French musicians Michel Blavet (the flautist who participated in the first performances of the Paris Quartets) and Rameau.

There are entries on Telemann's visits to Berlin, Darmstadt, Dresden and Paris, and less predictable places such as his occasional trips to the curative mineral baths at Bad Pyrmont. Zohn's introduction asserts that the principal places where

Telemann lived and worked are avoided because they ‘would largely duplicate material found in the Biography’, but I would have welcomed separate entries on Magdeburg, Hildesheim, Leipzig, Sorau, Eisenach, Frankfurt and Hamburg – although the musical and cultural life of the Hanseatic city pervades the entire compendium.

Light is shed on the composer’s dedications, estate (appraising what happened to his personal library after its bequest to his grandson), passion for gardening (Handel sent the avid horticulturalist plants from London on several occasions), his fortnightly periodical *Der getreue Music-Meister* (1728–29), his letters (nearly 130 from or to him have survived but they have never been published complete in English), and his penchant for writing poetry (including satirical epigrams and touching tributes to musical peers). The five authentic engraved portraits are described (it is surprising that most of them are not illustrated), as are his activities in publishing (he self-published 42 collections of music between 1725 and 1739). A short essay on reception history places Christoph Daniel Ebeling’s jab that ‘polygraphs seldom produce masterpieces’ (1770) into a narrative charting the ongoing rehabilitation of Telemann’s reputation. Another strand is a who’s who of German scholars and organisations to have made distinguished contributions to Telemann research and performance since the early 1900s; many of their achievements are represented in the selective yet large bibliography. A selective discography might have been equally valuable to newcomers. Nevertheless, all manner of readers will glean plenty of wisdom from Zohn’s magisterial guide to the highways and byways of Telemanniana. **David Vickers**

The Routledge Handbook to Music under German Occupation, 1938–1945

Propaganda, Myth and Reality

Edited by David Fanning and Erik Levi

Routledge, HB, 550pp, £190 (eBook £123.50)

ISBN 978-1-138-71388-8



The first point worth making is that this superb collection of essays is not an exercise in naming and shaming, even though stories emerge of the brave, the blameless and the culpable. Divided into eight sections including

subdivisions with articles covering a whole host of countries as far afield as France, Belgium, Greece, Latvia and Russia, the Handbook calls on the talents of numerous distinguished scholars, all of them eminently readable, who unfold one telling revelation after another. For example, who would have thought it possible that the Nazis could present the Polish Chopin as having Alsatian origins with a family name that was originally ‘Schopping’? (Katarzyna Naliwajek in ‘Nazi musical imperialism in occupied Poland’).

Among the most humbling contributions is ‘The Conservatoire in Occupied Kiev’ by Elena Zinkevych (translated by Michelle Assay), which calls extensively on the diary of the artist Irina Khoroshunova. And while many already know that in the Ukrainian ravine Babiy Yar the defenceless (women, children and the old) were massacred without mercy, Khoroshunova’s harrowing reportage painfully focuses the imagination’s lens. People are killed even if they ask for water or bread, ‘and we do not understand why we suddenly have more right to live, because we are not Jews’. The dead are buried alongside the living and half-living, children of mixed marriages being as cruelly victimised as tarnished non-Aryans.

Elsewhere long-sustained rumours have their roots exposed. No biographical study of the great Czech conductor Václav Talich that I have read mentions that he gratefully secured sponsorship from Joseph Goebbels to enable the Czech Philharmonic to play concerts in Berlin and Dresden in February 1941 (as revealed by Katerina Nová). It seems that from a purely political standpoint Talich also expressed some limited enthusiasm for the regime. He appreciated the efforts of leading German conductors to premiere Dvořák’s symphonic works in Germany and the wider world during the composer’s lifetime, a connection, Talich argued, that was intensified thanks to the artistic climate in the Third Reich, ‘which encouraged an even wider dissemination of his output’. Of course, this casts no light whatever on what Talich may or may not have thought about the Nazis’ more xenophobic policies, and the way they affected his orchestra, but it does explain, at least in part, the anti-collaborationists’ hostile attitude to him after the war. Another distinguished Czech maestro, Karel Šejna, conducted the Czech Philharmonic in honour of Hitler’s 55th birthday, including on the programme the Scherzo from Smetana’s *Triumphal Symphony*, ‘notable for its extensive quotation of the Austrian National Anthem’ says Nova, though not in the Scherzo.

‘Symphonies of War and Resistance’ includes detailed studies, with music examples, of Pavel Haas’s unfinished wartime Symphony, Paul von Klenau’s Ninth and Shostakovich’s *Leningrad* Symphony. The case of ‘Bartók against the Nazis’ (Nicolò Palazzetti) is especially interesting. ‘In spite of his hostility to fascist violence and censorship’, writes Palazzetti, ‘until the end of the 1930s, Bartók made many tours as a solo pianist in Mussolini’s Italy, and his compositions were performed both in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.’ And yet in Italy he was seen in some quarters as ‘the musician of freedom’ who sacrificed himself to redeem humankind from the violence of Nazism. Then again, the long-held claim that Bartók placed a veto on the broadcast of his music in Italy and Germany is rather more complicated than was previously thought. On a more positive, even remarkable note we are told about the European premiere of an opera by a Jewish American featuring African American characters and using spirituals, Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (the quintessential example of ‘Cultural Bolshevism’, to quote writer Michael Fjeldsøe), which took place in Nazi-occupied Denmark in March 1943, running for 22 performances. Another inspirational event, related by Alexandros Charkiolakis in ‘Music and Musical Life in Occupied Athens’, concerns a 1944 performance of Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio* at the Herodus Atticus Roman Theatre when in the final scene of Act 2, the setting free of the inmates of Don Pizarro’s jail ‘created uproar among the audience, who recognised themselves as those prisoners’, and Maria Callas’s assumption of the heroine Leonore was greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm.

Of course, what I’ve mentioned in this all-too-brief review is merely the tip of a towering iceberg. Surveying the winding machinations active in Nazi-occupied Europe is a hugely complicated task and Erik Levi, who has already produced important books on music and the Nazis, has, in collaboration with David Fanning, amassed a mountain of scholarly wisdom which inevitably poses many questions and potentially suggests many more books. Each contribution is tailed by copious notes, lists of archival materials and bibliographies; and with a relatively small basic point-size Routledge has crammed about as much as is humanly possible between two very hard covers. Though hardly a bargain in monetary terms, the Handbook outweighs paltry financial considerations with the importance of what it conveys. **Rob Cowan**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Jeremy Nicholas surveys recordings of Rachmaninov's impish masterpiece spanning nine decades

The last of Paganini's 24 Caprices for solo violin, Op 1, has captured the imagination of many musicians. Paganini himself thought well enough of it to make it the subject of 11 variations and a finale. Liszt was the first to make use of it for the piano as one of his six *Études d'exécution d'après Paganini* (1838/40), revised in 1851 as the *Grandes études de Paganini*. Most famously, Brahms worked the theme through 28 prodigious variations (his Op 35). Believing there was still solo piano music to be mined from the theme, Mark Hambourg's 16 *Variations on a Theme of Paganini* appeared in 1902; Ignaz Friedman's *Studien über ein Thema von Paganini*, Op 47b (17 variations) was published in 1914.

Sergey Rachmaninov's novel approach was to write his variations for piano and orchestra. He composed them during the summer of 1934 at Senar, his newly acquired villa near Lucerne. The manuscript is dated July 3 – August 18, 1934. The work was given its premiere in Baltimore just over 10 weeks later on November 7 with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski. Within a year, the Rhapsody had already established itself in the standard repertoire.

Rapsodie sur un thème de Paganini (it was the last time Rachmaninov used a French title for a work) is not really a rhapsody in the accepted sense but a straightforward set of 24 variations. These can be grouped by tonality: Vars 1-11 in A minor; 12-15 in D minor/F major; 16-18 in B flat minor/D flat major; 19-24 in A minor. It was his last concertante work and contains some of his best music.

It begins with an arresting 'Listen up!' nine-bar Introduction before the orchestra plays Var 1, marked *Precedente* (that is to say it precedes the statement of the theme proper), giving us merely its bare harmonic outline, with a similarity to the opening of the finale of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony that is surely more than a coincidence. After we hear the complete theme, Var 2 is further evidence that this music is not always going to be deadly serious. Vars 2-11 continue without a break, slackening in tempo only at Var 7, in which Rachmaninov introduces what is tantamount to a second subject, a theme that turns up in no fewer than 17 of his works (roughly a third of his output) – the solemn tune of the 'Dies irae' from the Requiem Mass, which he combines with Paganini's theme.

The tempo picks up again for Vars 8 and 9, the latter featuring the strings playing *col legno* (with the wood of the bow) and offering a serious coordination challenge to soloist and conductor. The 'Dies irae' theme returns in Vars 10 and 12 (*Tempo di minuetto*). The tempo returns to *allegro*, and even faster for the scintillating *scherzando* Var 15 for piano alone. Gradually the pace subsides, the mood changes – as does the key – and after the sinister Var 17, the sun comes out with the balm of D flat major and the most famous section of the work, Var 18, not conjured out of the ether like one of those poignant themes from Rachmaninov's earlier piano concertos, but the five semiquavers of the Paganini theme, inverted, changed from a minor to a major key and slowed down to an *andante cantabile* tempo. Genius.

After that we embark on what could be seen as the final movement. Vars 19-23

fly past at dazzling speed before a cadenza that leads to Var 24, known to some as 'the crème de menthe variation' because, so the story goes, Rachmaninov said he needed a tippie before playing the work with this most technically difficult of all the variations. The 'Dies irae' returns, blared out by the brass. There is a last *tutti* chord from the orchestra, played *sforzando fortissimo*, impishly undercut by the piano cheekily playing a fragment of the Paganini theme to give it the final word.

RACHMANINOV AND MOISEWITSCH

There are just shy of 400 recordings of the Rhapsody currently available in one form or another. The composer's own classic account was made on Christmas Eve 1934 with the Philadelphia and Stokowski.

Sergey Rachmaninov rejected a large number of individual takes and complete recordings during the course of his career. Significantly, on this occasion all six of the 78rpm sides issued were first takes. There is a leanness, a lightness of touch and an innate insouciance about his playing of the solo part that is utterly *sui generis*, a style which we must assume perfectly conveys the character of his score in the manner he desired. It is witty, playful, charming and musically sophisticated. But it is his use of rubato that is most striking, pushing ahead, slowing down, changing note values but always with a beguiling subtlety. Clearly, the composer's own recording is an important legacy.

Issued on HMV's prestigious red label, it was chosen by **Benno Moiseiwitsch** as one of the eight recordings to take to his imaginary desert island when he appeared on the BBC's eponymous programme in



Rachmaninov at Senar, his villa near Lucerne

October 1958 ('If I listen to his playing it will bring back very happy moments that we used to spend together'). Moiseiwitsch recorded his friend's Rhapsody twice, the first time in 1938 with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Basil Cameron. It was issued in the UK on HMV's cheaper plum label. The Naxos

transfer made from quieter RCA Victor pressings from the late 1930s is quite remarkably vivid. Tempos are even faster than the composer's but few details are skated over, Moiseiwitsch bringing the same light touch and playfulness to the score as the composer. His second recording was made in 1955 with the

Philharmonia under Hugo Rignold (EMI, 9/56 – nla) but sounds as though it's been recorded through a blanket. There is also film of Moiseiwitsch playing Vars 18-24 in the studio with Charles Groves. It was made in 1963, very shortly before his death, and when he was clearly below par. There are also live recordings available



Stephen Hough's performance of the Rhapsody comes as part of his concerto cycle from Dallas

with Malcolm Sargent, from the 1955 Proms (Guild, 10/07), and Adrian Boult (Testament, 9/15).

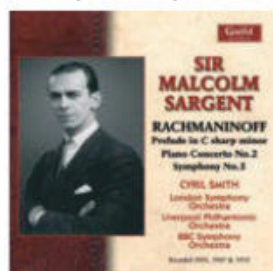
BEST AVOIDED

A very different mood is created by **Arthur Rubinstein** in his 1956 recording with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He sees the Rhapsody as more ominous and sinister, the 'Dies irae' theme acquiring a greater significance than its place as a subsidiary role. I found it disappointingly dour and studio-bound. We shall also have to pass over the mercurial **Shura Cherkassky** after his curiously leaden Introduction (though naturally there are welcome individual and imaginative touches elsewhere). An absolute no-no, too, for Cameron Carpenter's traducement of the work arranged for organ and orchestra (Sony Classical) – but useful for amusing your musical friends.

BEST HISTORICAL

Cyril Smith; Philh Orch / Sargent
Guild mono (B) GHCD2420

The composer's recording is a given – every home should have one – but recorded only a few months after the work's completion (and though it might be heresy in some quarters),



I think there is even more to be had from this score. For me, Cyril Smith and Sargent meet all requirements – and the sound quality on this CD is extraordinarily good.

AMERICANS FROM THE '50s AND '60s

The first thing that strikes you about **William Kapell**'s much-lauded account with Fritz Reiner and the Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia in his 1951 recording (RCA, 5/54) is the boomy acoustic. True, there is greater orchestral detail than on many more recent recordings – largely due to Reiner's infallible ear rather than microphone placement – while his soloist is on typically fiery form. It's all tremendously forceful and energetic and, of course, technically immaculate, but there are few moments of poetry. Better, in my opinion, is Kapell's live recording, captured in October 1945 with Artur Rodzinski and the Philharmonic Symphony of New York. Tempos are slightly more measured than with Reiner, but after pausing for breath after Var 18 it's the same steely, charmless chase to the end.

BEST WITH THE CONCERTOS

Stephen Hough; Dallas SO / Litton
Hyperion (E) (2) CDA67501/2

Stephen Hough is blessed in having a pianist-conductor who wears his (considerable) learning lightly and has himself long relished the delights, hidden and otherwise,



of Rachmaninov's superlative orchestration. And simultaneously – somehow – everyone seems to be getting off on the whole thing.

Julius Katchen's 'Rach Pag' coupled with Dohnányi's *Variations on a Nursery Song* has been a staple of the catalogue since it was set down in 1954. It has always been at or near the top of the pile. The recording in the much-missed Kingsway Hall was made 66 years ago but you really wouldn't know it. Producer James Walker and engineer Kenneth Wilkinson achieved a near-perfect balance, the sound is vibrant and vivid, and the playing of all concerned is simply superb, capturing all the music's drama, humour and lyricism without ever becoming portentous. Why the same team (Boult and the LPO) bothered to make a stereo remake five years later (Decca, 7/60) I don't know. It is very little different.

I found the recording with **Gary Graffman** and Leonard Bernstein exemplary in its execution and observation but, though highly praised in some quarters, strangely bland and anonymous (unlike most of Graffman's discography). Not so **Leon Fleisher** in 1957 with the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell. Their recording, albeit sounding a little elderly now, simply fizzes with life and energy. The strings are crisp and piquant, and the way Fleisher slips into Var 18 is quite masterly (Szell shapes this section beautifully). What blows it off course are the final two variations, in which speed takes precedence over clarity. I had no idea what the piano was doing in the last few pages.

Earl Wild in Kingsway Hall again, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Jascha Horenstein in 1965, also captures the Rachmaninov/Moisewitsch spirit with effortless aplomb. It's a classic account. Tempo relations between the variations are impeccably judged – try the link from Var 9 to Var 10 (poorly done by Rubinstein and Reiner) in which, for once, you can hear the glockenspiel, trombones and then the tuba play the 'Dies irae' under the piano's bravura passagework. But, impressive as Wild always is, for my money at 20'32" it is all too breathlessly fast, with

BEST ON DVD

Byron Janis; ORTF PO / Froment
EMI (E) DVD 310198-9

Byron Janis, still with us at 91, was in his prime aged 40 when he recorded this, just five years before psoriatic arthritis effectively ended his career. He relishes



every moment of the virtuoso solo part and the persistent camera angle from above allows you see exactly what a physically demanding one it is. Electrifying in every respect.

an insensitive Var 18 and the two final cadenzas pushed too hard.

THE UNDERRATED AND FORGOTTEN

The award for the most underrated version of this work goes to **Leonard Pennario** with the Boston Pops Orchestra under Arthur Fiedler. Recorded at Symphony Hall, Boston, in May 1963, the Rhapsody was Pennario’s debut on RCA. It is a performance that fulfils every criterion above – including the final glissando, the four bars of *fortissimo* octave trills three bars from the end (almost always drowned out) and the mischievous final two bars. These are not deal breakers, of course, but they represent the consistent excellence on show here. Pennario, undervalued and undeservedly overlooked, gives us, in almost every way, a great recording, with Fiedler highlighting Rachmaninov’s myriad conversational interjections with stylish aplomb.

Roger Fiske in the February 1962 issue of this journal thought the DG recording with **Margrit Weber**, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and Ferenc Fricsay ‘starts well with some slick, venomous playing by the orchestra’ (quite right) but that ‘it is soon clear that this performance will emphasise the satire at the expense of the sentiment’ (not in my opinion). Weber, an almost forgotten Swiss pianist, died in 2001 at the age of 77. This recording (new to me) has the sound quality of its time (1960) but I like it enormously for its clarity and unshowy bravura.

MORE RECENT RHAPSODIES

While **Denis Matsuev** uses the full sonority of his instrument to compelling effect, he lacks the playfulness of the composer, Moisewitsch and Wild, plays fast and loose with Rachmaninov’s dynamics and has trouble cultivating a true *pianissimo* tone anywhere. His partners are Valery Gergiev and his Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra.

The same conductor and orchestra accompany **Lang Lang** in a live recording. The Chinese superstar dispatches the solo part nimbly enough but without having anything personal to say. The piano is set well forwards, as are the double basses. Whether tweaked in the mix or too closely miked I don’t know, but in the first ‘Dies irae’ variation (No 7) they are obtrusive, their long pedal D flats at the end of Var 18 sound like a drone hovering overhead and they are even allowed to spill over into the tacet quaver and crotchet rests in the final bar.

Lack of space leaves me no room to commend in detail Simon Trpčeski (Avie, 9/11), Yevgeny Sudbin (BIS, 5/12), Jenő



Cyril Smith gives a compelling performance

Jandó (Naxos, 10/90), Idil Biret (also Naxos), Jorge Luis Prats (Resonance, 9/90), Howard Shelley (Chandos), Philippe Entremont (Sony, 9/60) and Mikhail Pletnev (Virgin/Erato, 12/88) – all of whom I have much enjoyed – but particular mention must be made of the most recent entry to the lists by **Behzod Abduraimov**, the aptly located Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and conductor James Gaffigan (an Editor’s Choice in the May 2020 issue). Played on Rachmaninov’s own piano, this is a sizzling account from the top drawer, superbly recorded and accompanied. The

coupling of his Symphony No 3 (also composed at Villa Senar) may or may not be an advantage, depending on your tastes and needs. I gave qualified praise to **Anna Fedorova**’s new recording in the April issue: I prefer her performance on YouTube with the Philharmonie Südwestfalen and Gerard Oskamp – well over 650,000 views to date.

Listening to **Stephen Hough**’s 2003 recording on Hyperion (Andrew Litton conducting the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and coupled with the four piano concertos), you are quickly aware of a more refined pianism. Clearly Hough knows the composer’s recording and has taken from that what he finds useful. Furthermore, he has made a close inspection of the score and decided that probably Rachmaninov knew what he was doing by acknowledging all the myriad dynamic and phrasing requests he thought best for his creation. Hough has then gone that one step further and made them his own.

More recently, there is **Daniil Trifonov** with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. I welcomed this in the September 2015 issue when it was *Gramophone*’s Recording of the Month. The sound, as I mentioned, is ‘sumptuous, full-bodied and realistic, with a near-perfect balance between piano and orchestra. The Philadelphia’s silky strings and characterful woodwind are a joy, while the percussion department is suitably punchy without being overcooked.’ Trifonov is a brilliant soloist but, returning to it, there are moments towards the end

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1934	Sergey Rachmaninov ; Philadelphia Orch / Leopold Stokowski	Naxos (B) 8 110602 (3/35 ^R)
1938	Benno Moiseiwitsch ; Liverpool PO / Basil Cameron	Naxos (B) 8 110676
1945	William Kapell ; Philh SO of New York / Artur Rodzinski	Pearl (M) GEMMCD9194
1948	Cyril Smith ; Philh Orch / Malcolm Sargent	Guild (B) GHCD2420 (11/49 ^R)
1954	Julius Katchen ; LPO / Adrian Boult	Dutton (F) CDLXT2504 (9/54 ^R , 5/96)
1956	Arthur Rubinstein ; Chicago SO / Fritz Reiner	RCA (M) (B) 09026 63035-2 (2/57 ^R)
1957	Leon Fleisher ; Cleveland Orch / George Szell	Philips (M) (2) 456 775-2PM2 (3/99)
1960	Margrit Weber ; Berlin RSO / Ferenc Fricsay	DG (S) (S) (B) 474 383-2GOM9 (A/03)
1963	Leonard Pennario ; Boston Pops Orch / Arthur Fiedler	RCA (S) (12) 19075 89927-2 (2/64 ^R , 5/19)
1964	Gary Graffman ; New York PO / Leonard Bernstein	Sony (S) (24 discs) 88725 46239-2 (4/65 ^R , 1/14)
1965	Earl Wild ; RPO / Jascha Horenstein	Chandos (B) (2) CHAN10078 (12/81 ^R , 9/87 ^R)
1968	Byron Janis ; ORTF PO / Louis de Froment	EMI (F) (DVD) 310198-9
1970	Shura Cherkassky ; WR SO, Cologne / Zdeněk Mácal	ICA Classics (F) ICAC5020
1971	Vladimir Ashkenazy ; LSO / André Previn	Decca (M) 417 702-2DM; (S) (6) 455 234-2LC6; (S) (3) 473 251-2DTR3; (F) (2) + (S) 478 6443 (9/72 ^R)
2003	Stephen Hough ; Dallas SO / Andrew Litton	Hyperion (F) (2) CDA67501/2 (A/04)
2004	Lang Lang ; Mariinsky Th Orch / Valery Gergiev	DG (F) 477 5231GH (4/05); (F) (S) 477 5499GSA
2009	Denis Matsuev ; Mariinsky Th Orch / Valery Gergiev	Mariinsky (M) (S) MAR0505 (4/10)
2010	Yuja Wang ; Mahler CO / Claudio Abbado	DG (F) 477 9308GH (6/11)
2015	Daniil Trifonov ; Philadelphia Orch / Yannick Nézet-Séguin	DG (F) 479 4970GH (9/15)
2019	Behzod Abduraimov ; Lucerne SO / James Gaffigan	Sony Classical (F) 19075 98162-2 (5/20)
2019	Anna Fedorova ; St Gallen SO / Modestas Pitrenas	Channel Classics (F) CCS42620 (4/20)

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Yuja Wang, with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Claudio Abbado, is simply sensational

where he over-interprets (such as the two final cadenzas) and loses tension.

OLD FAVOURITES

Apparently, **Vladimir Ashkenazy** and André Previn simply played the work twice in the studio and decided no patching was needed. It shows. It is another classic account which from long affection I find hard not to place on the winner's pedestal. Never mind 'listen up!' – the Introduction grabs you by the scruff of the neck: this is going to be a story worth hearing. Like Hough and Litton, there is a pianist-conductor on the rostrum who makes the orchestra alive to every nuance, someone who keeps the tone light-hearted but not overly so, relishing the splashes of orchestral colour and the composer's knowing winks. It reminds us what a very great pianist Ashkenazy was at this time (1971). An obfuscated glissando (Var 24) and a flaccid last two bars are two (minimal) reservations.

VICTOR LUDORUM


One purpose of these pages is to choose the recording which presents the score as clearly as possible in a performance that transcends the bounds of the studio, is well balanced/recorded, has something vital and maybe individual to say about the music and which invites repeated listening. To nail the Introduction, Theme and all 24 variations faultlessly is

well-nigh impossible. Three recordings come pretty close.

The first is by **Cyril Smith**, with Malcolm Sargent conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1948. In his *Gramophone* review of November 1949, Lionel Salter, for whom I have the greatest respect, thought the performance was 'superbly competent from all concerned (save for the sour oboe solo in Variation 16)' – I wrote 'lemony' in my listening notes – with 'a well-balanced soloist-orchestra relationship, excellent ensemble, a clean recording which captures every orchestral detail'. But in the end LS disliked it all because 'the slickness of this performance leans over into flashiness'. *Au contraire*: I think it is exactly that quality that makes it so compelling and which brings out all the wit and brilliance of a score 'abounding in ingenious effects of all kinds and yet profoundly musical in conception' (LS). He feels it's all about 'sparkle and glitter'. I beg to differ. A tiny detail – the diminuendo Smith observes at bar 20 in Var 20 – is an example of his deep respect for the score. He is one of few pianists to observe this, as is his playing of the crotchet countermelody in Var 17, which LS perceives as 'thumping his way through'. As for the D flat variation, schmaltz or not, it brought tears to my eyes, and you cannot gainsay that. And, glory be, the two final cheeky bars are played *a tempo* without the almost universal

rit. This is a version to live with even if it is not quite in today's state-of-the-art sound.

For the best on DVD, I am going to choose a performance that has a handful of fluffs, moments of wayward ensemble, is not in Technicolor 21st-century digital sound and indeed not in colour at all, but black-and-white. Ultimately, these elements are, for me, of lesser concern than getting to the heart of the composer's aims and wishes; and if you want a version that captures every musical element and characterisation of the score, and at the same time see one of the greatest living pianists playing it live in concert, then you have to experience **Byron Janis** with the Orchestre Philharmonique de l'ORTF under Louis de Froment, filmed in Paris in 1968. I've watched it many times now and I shall return to it many times in the future.

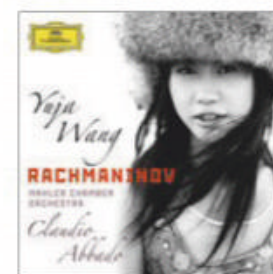
But the recording that comes closer than anyone to getting all 24 variations right with equal consistency, discernment, accuracy and conviction, with suave, pinpoint orchestral accompaniment, with near-ideal recorded balance in a natural acoustic and with a simply sensational soloist is the one with **Yuja Wang**, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Claudio Abbado. At every point in the score where others fall short, you are left amazed at the way she and her conductor clear each hurdle and with such profound musicality: the pacing of the first 'Dies irae' variation, the phrasing of the *scherzando* (Wang has few equals here) and D flat variations, the electrifying 'crème de menthe', the gleeful glissando and final two bars – it's all there, razor-sharp, impish and unerringly capturing the spirit of the composer. It's a score that suits Yuja Wang to a T – T here standing for 'technique'. And, as Nijinsky said, technique is freedom. Rachmaninov and Paganini would surely have been delighted. 

TOP CHOICE

Yuja Wang; Mahler CO / Abbado

DG © 477 9308GH

To quote my original review, 'The technical demands of the Rhapsody (Var 24 for example) hold no terrors for [Yuja Wang], of course, and her trademark impetuosity, which she injects into the bravura variations, is thrilling. But, more importantly, she is also an artist with that unteachable



ability to tug at the emotions without recourse to sentimentality, as her playing of the famous Var 18 beautifully illustrates.'

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THIS MONTH Arcam combines disc playback and network streaming in one unit, ideas for better desktop listening, and a masterpiece rediscovered in high resolution
Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

JUNE TEST DISCS



A beautifully judged programme of Bizet and Gounod, played with style by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and with a vivid hi-res sound.



Showing just what DSD can do, this set of piano quartets by The Brahms Project on Eudora in DSD256 has superb detail, dynamics and fluidity.

A big amp from one of the high end's big names

The high end is still flourishing, with a celebrated designer launching a new integrated amplifier



A new integrated amplifier from one of the best-known names in high-end audio, Dan D'Agostino, the Progression Integrated **1** delivers 200W into 8 ohms and double that into 4 ohms, thus enabling purchasers to buy the specification required. The base amplifier, at £18,500, offers two single-ended inputs and three balanced, including a fixed-gain home cinema passthrough, while those using a turntable can add an optional moving coil phono stage for £2250, either when ordered or at a later stage. A full digital module is also available, using a differential DAC configuration and offering conventional digital inputs, USB connectivity for a computer and network music streaming over Ethernet and Wi-Fi. Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer and Spotify are supported, with MQA and Roon compatibility also built in. Again, the digital module can be retrofitted; but purchase prices with it built in are £24,000, or £26,250 if the phono module is also specified.

Unusually, the Progression remote control connects to the amplifier via Bluetooth, the company saying this gives up to five times the range of conventional infrared remote systems, and will also work



without line of sight to the amp. Available in black or silver, the amplifier also has a pair of analogue meters, which can show volume, balance, phase and mute settings as well as indicating output power. It joins the existing Progression models in the D'Agostino line-up, which includes a pre-amp and both stereo and mono power amplifiers. And this is far from the range-topping line-up: that status is reserved for the Relentless pre-amp and monoblocs, the latter weighing 275kg apiece, delivering a claimed 1500W each, rising to 6000W into 2 ohms, and costing £250,000 a pair.

Talking as we were of Roon, two major manufacturers have announced that their products are now certified Roon Ready. Cambridge Audio's Edge NQ and CXN (V2) models **2** are now compatible, while Sound United **3** has posted a huge list of its Denon and Marantz products now able to work with Roon: 59 in total, including mini-systems, network players and AV receivers, and USB DACs.

Italian manufacturer Audio Analogue has launched a new digital-to-analogue converter, the AAdac **4**, which joins the AAcento integrated amplifier and



AAphono vinyl stage in the company's PureAA line-up. Designed to handle digital signals at up to 768kHz/32-bit and DSD512, it's based around the ESS Sabre ES9038 converter and offers a range of inputs including USB, optical, coaxial and AES/EBU, and also has Bluetooth capability. There's a choice of seven user-selectable digital filters and the conversion stage is fully balanced for noise rejection. The entire unit is constructed from discrete components in the quest for sonic purity, low noise and signal purity. Separate boards are used for each stage, and the digital and analogue sections have their own power supplies. The AAdac has a high-quality headphone output and a choice of fixed or voltage-regulated analogue out, thus enabling it to be used as a conventional DAC or as a pre-amplifier. It sells for £3299, in either black or silver.

Finally this month, Pro-Ject is taking steps to ensure the records you play on its turntables are crackle-free: buyers of the company's X1 and X2 turntables **5** can now claim a free Spin Clean Record Washer System MkII, worth £90. Using distilled water and with a drying cloth supplied, the system avoids using brushes to clean the record, instead using the motion of the disc through its 'bath'. **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Arcam CDS50

Andrew Everard gets to grips with Arcam's combination SACD/CD and network player, seemingly a one-box wonder



ARCAM CDS50

Type SACD/CD/Network player

Price £699

File formats played CD, CD-R, SACD; FLAC, WAV, AIFF & OGG to 192kHz/24-bit; AAC to 96kHz/24-bit; WMA to 192kbps/48kHz; MP3 to 320kbps/48kHz

Inputs USB Type A, optical/coaxial digital

Outputs Line on RCA phonos, XLR balanced, optical/coaxial digital

Networking Ethernet/Wi-Fi

Accessories supplied Wi-Fi antenna, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.3x8.7x28.3cm
arcam.co.uk

There was a look of bemusement on the face of a twenty-something with whom I was recently talking music, when I realised I'd finally reached my 'a gramophone, grandad?' moment. Discussing a newly released album, there was something of a gasp, and when I mentioned it came as a double-CD set, true incredulity set in: 'Nobody', I was told, 'buys CDs anymore' – this statement being followed by a demonstration of just how quickly a track could be summoned up from the ether using no more than an iPhone.

Unwilling to burst the bubble of this moment of technological triumph, I held back on mentioning that a) people did still buy CDs; b) those people included me; and anyway, c) there are a lot of us out there with extensive disc collections we're not ready to junk any day soon, even if we've already embraced storing our music

on a home server and/or streaming from online services.

It's to those of us who find ourselves at the crossroads between physical and virtual music collections that I suspect Arcam is targeting its CDS50, the only disc player in the range of a company responsible for launching, way back when, a UK-built CD machine designed to take on the dominance of the likes of Sony, Denon and Marantz in the market for affordable hi-fi. Or, as company founder John Dawson memorably explained it to me at the time, 'It's going to stick it to the Japanese'.

Times change, and the market has moved on with the growth in streaming services, while at the same time Arcam is now owned by Harman International, itself part of Samsung. And while the CDS50 carries a 'Designed in the UK' legend, it's now made not in Arcam's Cambridgeshire factory – that's long gone – but in China.

Neither is this machine quite as new as it seems, despite being finished in the company's latest HDA range look. To put it charitably, it's 'closely related' to the previous CDS27, part of the FMJ range, offering similar facilities and capabilities.

That's not to say that what you get for your money isn't impressive, especially when the CDS50 is available for just £699. If memory serves, the old CDS27 was at least £100 more. This is not only a CD player but one capable of handling SACDs, too, and on top of that it's also a network audio player, able to work with content stored locally – whether on a home computer or a dedicated network-attached storage (NAS) device – as well as online streaming services.

It also has a USB socket, to which storage can be attached for playback of music it contains, and optical and coaxial digital inputs so existing digital sources can

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

With its wide-ranging capabilities, the Arcam is an excellent keystone for a simple but flexible system.

ARCAM SA10 AMPLIFIER

An obvious partner for the CDS50 is Arcam's own SA10 amplifier, which delivers 50W per channel and will operate from the same remote handset.



SAMSUNG S10

Samsung's S10 phone offers a large display in a compact handset and will be ideal as a device on which to run the Arcam Music Life app.



be played through its onboard conversion. However, it should be noted that this socket is on the rear of the player, which might be less than convenient if you're swapping USB 'sticks' full of music (though not if you're using a high-capacity drive with all your music stored on it, only removed occasionally for 'top-ups' of music. Those with 'sticks' might like to do what I did, which was plug a short USB extension cable into the rear socket and run it under the player to provide a socket at the front. A 0.5m cable was more than sufficient, and you can buy these for well under £5. By the way, this port can also be used for any firmware updates available for download from the Arcam website.

It's to those of us who find ourselves at the crossroads between physical and virtual music collections that Arcam is targeting its CDS50

All of the CDS50's flexibility has been achieved while still keeping it looking like a conventional CD player, clad in the purposeful Arcam 'new look'. The secret of this simplicity is that all the additional functionality is handled by the company's Music Life app, available for iOS via the App Store and via Google Play for Android smartphones and tablets.

Using this, and subject to the usual subscriptions, the user can access, via the Airable platform, the 'hi-res' streaming services of the German company HighResAudio, Qobuz and Tidal, and also Napster and Deezer, along with internet radio services and podcasts. It's not the slickest piece of streaming control software out there but it does the job effectively enough. It is possible to use the network capabilities of the Arcam without recourse to the app, using the remote handset and the front-panel display, but this is somewhat laborious, especially if you have a large network music collection through which to scroll.

Network connectivity on the CDS50 is available via either Ethernet or Wi-Fi, the latter using the usual stub

antenna screwed on to a mounting point on the rear of the unit. Although the player's streaming capability is limited to 192kHz/24-bit, which is well within the capability of Wi-Fi given a decent signal on the home network, I found it advantageous to use a wired network connection – not for sound quality but for ultimate stability. But then I do have a pretty busy Wi-Fi environment in my home; you may well find Wi-Fi more than adequate.

PERFORMANCE

The look of Arcam's products may have changed under its ownership by Harman and ultimately Samsung but both the styling and the sound are still unmistakable. It's often hard to give broad-brush descriptions of the way a product sounds, as so many factors come into play – not least of which are the recordings themselves and the rest of the system with which a component is partnered – but the balance here is perhaps best described as 'easy-going', meaning the player will sound very good indeed in a wide range of set-ups.

This isn't a player all about maximum hi-fi attack, whether you play CDs, SACDs or network/online music. Instead the treble is smooth and sweet while still informative, bringing out the ambience of a recording without assailing the ears with any brightness or stridency. Add to that a well-judged midband and a bass that, while not the last word in depth and thunder, is both rich and warm, and the result is an impressively large-scale, mature sound unlikely to be upset by either hard recordings or speakers with a tendency to top-end exuberance.

From Qobuz hi-res streams and SACDs all the way down to internet radio streams – some of which are offered at very low bit-rates – the Arcam's smooth, generous balance is consistently listenable. What it lacks in high-end hyper-detailed appeal it more than makes up for in its relaxed, controlled sound, and while its streaming capability in no way redefines the state of the art when it comes to the range of formats it encompasses, for most listeners it will be more than adequate. And that, in essence, is its appeal. **G**

Or you could try ...

Combining CD/SACD playback and network streaming, the CDS50 is relatively unusual, but there are products out there offering at least some of this capability.

Yamaha CD-NT670D

Yamaha, for example, offers the CD-NT670D, which supports CD playback (but not SACD) and can stream music at up to 192kHz/24-bit, as well as internet radio stations. Unusually, it also has a built-in DAB/FM tuner. Find out more at uk.yamaha.com.



Bluesound Vault 2i

Taking a different approach is the Bluesound Vault 2i, a disc ripper/storage device complete with streaming capability, making it able not only to make the music stored on its 2TB hard drive available to other network products but also to play CDs and act as a streaming client for online music services, controlled by a dedicated app. It's a highly flexible device, whether used alone or as part of a Bluesound multiroom set-up. More information at bluesound.com.



Marantz ND8006

The Marantz ND8006 is designed as 'the complete digital music source' and, as well as playing CDs, it has full network audio capability, including Spotify Connect, Amazon Music, Tidal, Deezer and more, plus Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay 2 and internet radio. It doesn't play SACD discs but its network section can handle files up to DSD512/11.2MHz and ultra-hi-res PCM. See marantz.com for the full specification.



● LOCKDOWN LISTENING

Home-working heroes

If you're working at home and want to set up a personal audio system, it's never been simpler to get great sound, says Andrew Everard

One of the benefits of breaking free from the office is the ability to have music while you work, untroubled by the listening preferences of those around you. I know my working life is greatly improved by my own 'desktop audio' system, which has now been tried and tested over the better part of five years: my computer monitor sits atop an elderly Naim Uniti, feeding a pair of compact Neat Acoustics speakers on foam studio monitor wedges I picked up from an online professional audio retailer. This is fed from a Roon core running on a little Intel NUC computer, enabling me to summon up my choice of listening from my screen, selecting seamlessly from my network storage, Qobuz or Tidal streaming music, or internet radio stations.

Now it may be heresy to mention it here, but most of my listening on this system tends to be spoken-word radio, for the simple reason that when I play music I like to immerse myself in the performance, which is hardly conducive to concentration on what I am writing. For some reason, listening to speech seems to work best when writing – but maybe that's just me ...

Yes, my desktop system is perhaps somewhat extreme, and at the opposite end of the spectrum there's the simple route of plugging a pair of headphones into a computer – or even a smartphone or tablet running the likes of the BBC Sounds app – for which there are a range of options to maximise the sound. Given that the headphone output on most computers isn't so good, let's start with a couple of options to make more of it, and better drive whichever headphones you choose to use.

Cambridge Audio Dacmagic XS



This little device is one of a raft of easily portable 'computer audio' digital-to-analogue converters from leading manufacturers. Originally launched at £100, it was at the time of writing available for £50, making it an excellent buy. It connects to a computer via a USB cable and has a 3.5mm stereo output for headphones, plus clear volume up/down buttons and – well, that's about it. Cambridge Audio has been making DACs for a very long time and that

expertise shows in the confident, detailed sound of this tiny device, which does a fine job of driving even large headphones. It can also be used – with a suitable cable – to feed audio from a computer to an amplifier or hi-fi system.

Audioquest DragonFly



There are now three models in the 'USB DAC in a stick' range from American company Audioquest, whose original DragonFly set the trend for simple devices designed to boost computer audio. Pull off the cap, plug the device into a USB port on your computer and you have a complete hi-fi DAC/headphone amplifier in miniature, small enough to slip in a pocket. Like all of these miniature DACs, it's powered from the computer. The DragonFly now comes in three variants, each offering enhanced sound quality. The basic Black should be more than good enough for casual listening and use with mid-range headphones, but if you want to take things more seriously or have headphones needing more to drive them, you can move up the range to the Red model or the very latest DragonFly Cobalt, which is a very superior DAC and headphone amplifier in a tiny package.

Bowers & Wilkins PX5



An alternative to following the route of plugging a miniature DAC into your computer is to use a pair of wireless headphones, which have all the digital-to-analogue circuitry and amplification built in and will connect to your computer – or a smartphone or tablet – via Bluetooth. The PX5 is the more affordable of two pairs of Bluetooth headphones in the Bowers & Wilkins range and includes the company's Adaptive Noise Cancelling system, which is just as effective in excluding domestic noise as it always has been with the background sound of planes and trains. That's handy if you're working at home; and if you do need to respond you can simply lift one of the earcups, which will pause whatever's playing. Best of all, the on-ear design of the

PX5 and the use of materials such as woven carbon fibre means the headphones are light and comfortable, with none of that 'shut-in' effect you get with some bulkier designs.

Denon Home 350



The Denon Home wireless speaker range is the latest iteration of what started out as HEOS by Denon and provides a complete multiroom solution for hi-resolution audio, whether stored on a home computer or accessed via streaming services. You can start with just one speaker – the entry-level is the little Home 150, which you can use singly or pair up to create a stereo system and which can access services including Spotify, Tidal and Amazon's Music HD, as well as internet radio. It can be controlled via a dedicated app running on a smartphone or tablet, or using a range of voice control systems: Amazon Alexa, Apple's Siri and Google Assistant. The Home 350 is the big brother of the range, providing a complete stereo solution in one box, with separate treble, mid-range and bass drivers for each channel, each driver being powered by its own amplifier.

Chord Mojo/Poly



The Mojo is the Chord Electronics answer to all those pocket DAC/headphone amplifiers appearing on the market to be used with computers, smartphones and tablets, designed to bring the company's innovative digital-to-analogue conversion technology into a highly portable form without compromising on quality. The design has been highly successful, creating perhaps the best ultra-compact DAC/headphone amp on the market, complete with wide-ranging format compatibility and the manufacturer's signature 'coloured ball' controls. To Mojo has recently been added Poly, a tiny clip-on unit combining network streaming via Wi-Fi and the ability to play music stored on microSD cards. Handbuilt in the UK, with solid machined aluminium casework, this is a very superior personal music-streaming system. **G**

● ESSAY

Classic recordings coming up fresh

With a seemingly endless supply of new hi-resolution music releases, it's good to see the technology being used to breathe new life into famous recordings from the past

Over recent years, I've become something of a convert to high-resolution audio, taking advantage of greater broadband bandwidth and the falling price of storage devices to download music in a variety of formats 'beyond CD'. Having started out with a relatively modest two-disc server, with what seemed like a huge amount of storage, such that I wondered whether I would ever fill it, I've found myself on a cycle of upgrades and expansion as the music grew to fill the space available.

Whereas once recordings at 96kHz/24-bit – as opposed to the 44.1kHz/16-bit of CD – seemed quite adventurous, now I am buying at 192kHz/24-bit or even 352kHz/32-bit, and the 2.8MHz/1-bit (or DSD64) of Super Audio CD has moved on to the point where you can buy some recordings in DSD512, or 11.2MHz/1-bit. What's more, with some digital-to-analogue converters appearing capable of DSD1024/22.4MHz, it seems there's no end in sight for those interested in using ever greater amounts of data to 'describe' the sound recorded.

Now I'm not planning on getting into the maelstrom of argument still raging online about how much data is enough for human hearing: the opposing parties are too deeply entrenched and the skirmishes seemingly inexhaustible. I have to say I think I can hear the differences between a high-quality DSD or DXD recording and one downsampled to CD quality, and the completist in me tends to think that the more data used to convey a recording, the better the accuracy, even if this isn't – at least for the naysayers – reflected in what they hear.

That question of data crops up on a regular basis when it comes to the matter of archiving recordings, and there was quite a furore some years back when Sony revealed that it was using DSD as a means of archiving its recordings, as it would given that it was – along with Philips – behind the development and commercialisation of the format.

One strong advocate of the PCM format used for CD (and many higher-resolution) recordings thundered that 'The notion of DSD being the ultimate "archival" format is in keeping with Sony's original concept, but even to imagine that recording



Peter Phillips, whose *Allegri* has been restored

engineers and record labels would consider switching to DSD for their productions or that they would transcode everything to DSD for long-term storage is ridiculous. They would sooner archive their masters to high-quality analogue tape ... and some actually are!

Analogue masters can be retrieved and sympathetically restored, and the results can be spectacular

The view from the pro-DSD camp was somewhat different. I've heard – both from acquaintances in Sony at the time and from the late Ken Ishiwata, who championed SACD and DSD at Marantz – the view that DSD is effectively analogue anyway. As they explained, a true one-bit stream at a very high sampling rate requires only a very simple mechanism to turn it into something able to be output to a conventional amplifier: in essence, nothing more than a low-pass filter to remove everything above the intended frequency range of the recording. You can see that in action in the likes of the Marantz SA10 player, which was very much Ishiwata's statement product. However, there is a major concern in the release of much

material in these 'hi-res' formats, be they PCM or DSD: what, exactly, was the source material? In the past, considerable cynicism has arisen following the discovery that music being sold as high-resolution was little more than an upsample of existing digital files intended for the production of CD, whether through laziness on the part of those releasing such recordings, a lack of quality control in the sourcing of material or the simple fact that suitable sources no longer exist.

Many recordings have long ago been digitised using the standards of the day and the masters lost or destroyed, or were simply recorded digitally at CD quality in the first place, and that's all there is. So while it may seem perverse to be going back to pre-CD recordings as a source for high-resolution releases, in many cases – at least where the analogue master tapes still exist – that's the remastering engineer's best bet at coming up with something 'beyond CD'.

We've seen that a lot of late in the rock music field, with analogue masters being retrieved, sympathetically restored and (in some cases) remixed, sometimes by those associated with the original sessions. And the results can be spectacular. That's certainly the case with one of the most recent reissues to come my way, Gimmell's 40th-anniversary high-resolution release of one of its first recordings, The Tallis Scholars' 1980 reading of *Allegri's Miserere* in the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford. I first bought this on a Classics for Pleasure LP almost as soon as it was released, costing around £1, and was captivated by the sound even on the simple system I had in those days.

However, I found subsequent digital releases somewhat strident, especially on Alison Stamp's soaring top notes. All that has changed in the new release, the result of founders Peter Phillips and Steve Smith going back to the original (analogue) mastertapes, recorded with a pair of valve microphones on 15ips tapes with Dolby A noise reduction and, as Smith told me, 'edited with a razor blade'. In the 192kHz/24-bit release, the recording sounds spectacularly fresh, showing just what today's hi-resolution formats can do with fine sound from the past. 🎧

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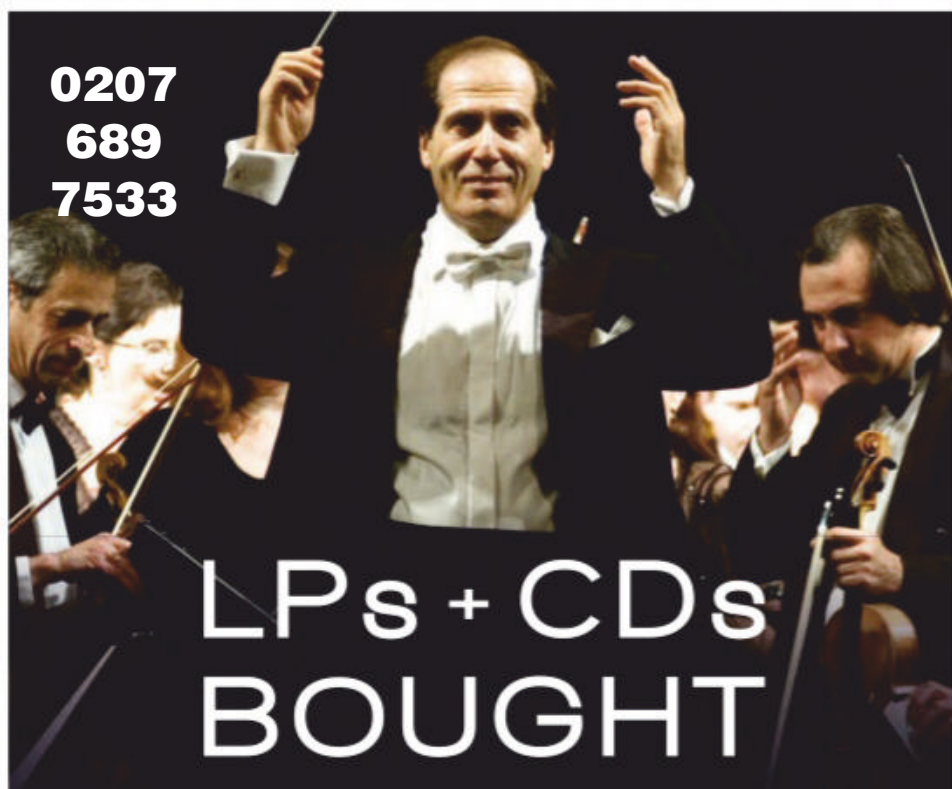
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Karajan's Beethoven Ninth

Thank you for the overview of recordings of this rather puzzling work in April's *Gramophone* Collection (page 130). I just wanted to point out that the 'matchless visualisation of the inner workings of the Ninth' (Richard Osborne) directed by Humphrey Burton is available in the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall. It really is stunning and proves that Herbert von Karajan was a much more capable conductor than a film director. Members of the orchestra often warn self-appointed experts about judging their work with Karajan without having experienced it live.

Richard R Liu

Basel, Switzerland

Mahler 3 from Horenstein ...

I am a member of the Gustav Mahler Society in Vienna and a very keen devotee of Mahler's music so I was excited to read the 'Classics Reconsidered' article on Mahler's Third Symphony conducted by Jascha Horenstein (April, page 126).

I was very fortunate to be at the 1971 launch of that recording which was held at the Commonwealth Centre in Kensington. Present were Horenstein and Deryck Cooke, the musicologist and Mahler scholar. The music was played back in superb quadraphonic sound using 15ips tape recorders. I also acquired a signed conductor's copy of the libretto that accompanied the LPs.

The sound and balance on the original LPs is superb; however, when the CDs were released, they were disappointing – in particular, the balances between various instruments were not precise and the string sections of the orchestra were not emphasised, unlike the original master tapes. I still consider Horenstein's performance and the London Symphony Orchestra's playing to be the best overall performance, in keeping with Mahler's score and the composer's emotional intentions. For example, the ending of the first movement is so exciting and vibrant, while the slow movements are completely ethereal and magical.

It is a pity that this performance could not have been transferred to surround-sound CDs or even Blu-ray audio, but perhaps that's too much to ask.

David Orr

Victoria, Australia

Letter of the Month

Meeting Teresa Berganza north of the border

David Patrick Stearns's 'Icons' article on Teresa Berganza in May (page 62) brought back many cherished memories of her performances.

Mme Berganza was quite a regular visitor to Edinburgh in the 1970s and '80s. I recall her first as a

charming Cherubino in a 1975 production

of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* under the baton of Daniel Barenboim at the Edinburgh Festival.

Berganza's recording of Bizet's *Carmen* – based on a 1977 Edinburgh Festival production – is often cited as an essential recording. Apparently the then Director of the Festival, Peter Diamand, allocated half of the annual budget on this one opera production! (I doubt that this would happen nowadays.)



Precious memento: this writer's signed photograph of Teresa Berganza

In 1987 I was fortunate to hear Berganza give a glowing recital of Spanish songs in the sumptuous surroundings of Hopetoun House and Estate on the outskirts of Edinburgh. After the performance she very graciously agreed to pose for a photograph for me as a memento of a never-to-be-forgotten evening.

Graham Sutherland
Edinburgh

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... but why the ambivalence?

I bought Jascha Horenstein's recording of Mahler's Symphony No 3 when it was issued almost 50 years ago. After reading the discussion by Peter Quantrill and David Gutman several times, what I find most striking is their apparent ambivalence towards it and the extent of their reservations and qualifications. A principal concern seems to be that Horenstein's reading does not reflect subsequent scholarship. I'm sure I am far from alone in not having kept up with modern scholarship about most composers, for reasons to do with other elements of my life. This may put me in that category of listeners described by

Peter Quantrill in the last paragraph, about whom he suggests that their outlook may say more about them than about the piece. I am left wondering whether that remark also says something about the reviewers.

Tony Williams

Overton, Hampshire

Brahms clarinet sonatas query

Might I make a small correction to Mark Pullinger's interesting review of recordings of the Brahms clarinet sonatas (May, page 108)?

He states, on page 113, that Frederick Thurston didn't record the E flat Sonata – having discussed it on page 108. I think he

meant to say that Thurston didn't record the F minor Sonata ... but even that is not quite accurate. I say that because the F minor Sonata *was* indeed recorded on May 13, 1941, with Kathleen Long (matrices AR5732/37).

Sadly, despite a total of nine takes being made of the six sides required, the discs were not passed for issue. Perhaps somebody has a set of test pressings ...
Neil Mantle, via email

Editorial notes

David Fanning writes: In my review of 'Rachmaninov in Lucerne' (May, page 44) I mentioned the last item on the disc as the first of Rachmaninov's Op 16 *Moments musicaux*. In fact it's the first of Tchaikovsky's Op 16 Romances,

in Rachmaninov's transcription. I was following the information in the Sony Classical programme description, but the piece is well enough known to make that a poor excuse.

Other corrections: Philip Clark's book, *Dave Brubeck: A Life in Time*, reviewed last month (page 106), is published in the UK by Headline (Da Capo is the US publisher). And finally, also last month (page 58), Richard Bratby reviewed



Grieg's violin sonatas on Orchid Classics but the cover was of a release of the same works on BIS (see our review this issue, page 45). Here's the correct cover (left).

OBITUARIES

KENNETH GILBERT

Harpsichordist, organist and teacher
Born December 16, 1931
Died April 16, 2020



The Canadian harpsichordist, organist, musicologist and teacher Kenneth Gilbert has died at the age of 88. He studied at the

Conservatoire in his native city of Montreal with Yvonne Hubert (piano) and Gabriel Cusson (harmony and counterpoint) before travelling to Paris on a Prix d'Europe scholarship to study with the organist Gaston Litaize with whom he worked on the early French composers, notably Dandrieu, Clérambault and de Grigny. He was soon working at the harpsichord where his mentor was Ruggero Gerlin, who had been Wanda Landowska's assistant, and also with Sylvie Spicket from 1953 to 1955. He later studied privately under Landowska, as well as with Nadia Boulanger (composition) and Maurice Duruflé (organ).

From 1952 to 1967 he was organist and music director at Queen Mary Road United Church (now Rosedale Queen Mary United Church) in Montreal. In 1967 he returned to Paris on a Canadian government grant to undertake research on François Couperin for a CBC series on the composer. After completing this research, he undertook a project to prepare a new edition of Scarlatti's 555 keyboard sonatas. Further

scholarly undertakings included work on the keyboard works of Couperin, d'Anglebert, Frescobaldi and Rameau.

He taught at the Conservatoire de musique du Québec (1957-74), McGill University (1964-72), Laval University (1969-76) and the Royal Flemish Conservatoire in Antwerp (1971-74), and, in 1988, he was appointed a professor at the Paris Conservatoire, the first North American to be given such a role. He also gave numerous masterclasses and summer courses. His pupils include Emmanuelle Haïm, Sébastien d'Hérin, Davitt Moroney, Ludger Rémy, Scott Ross, Jos Van Immerseel and Jory Vinikour.

In 1968 he performed in London and his international career was launched, one that skilfully balanced performance and scholarship.

He recorded extensively, first for the Canadian Baroque Records Co label and then for Harmonia Mundi and DG's Archiv Produktion label. Though his repertoire tended to focus on the French Baroque, he recorded a great deal of music by JS Bach for Archiv including *The Art of Fugue*, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and the complete harpsichord concertos alongside Trevor Pinnock, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Nicholas Kraemer and The English Concert. He was also the subject of a film by Michel Follin, released on DVD by Harmonia Mundi.

Reviewing an early instalment in his series of the *ordres* by Couperin (RCA), Stephen Plaistow wrote: 'When I wrote at some length about the previous issue



Barbirolli: celebrating an astonishing legacy

Half a century on from the British conductor's death, Andrew Farach-Colton explores Sir John's prolific career through some of his finest recordings

Bavouzet's Beethoven

As the French pianist kickstarts an innovative Beethoven Year project, he speaks to Michelle Assay about appreciating Beethoven's genius within the context of the composer's less well-known contemporaries, and of his love of recording

Beethoven Collection

Charlotte Gardner is on a mission to find which recorded version of the Violin Concerto fares best

GRAMOPHONE

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in this series that RCA are doing with Kenneth Gilbert ... I said that not since Thurston Dart's day has there been such a fruitful coincidence of the scholar's mind and the performer's fingers in this field. In the first flush of enthusiasm one is all too likely to pitch a claim too high. But that one I made with confidence, I'll make it again, and indeed I don't expect it to be seriously challenged.'

JENNIFER BATE

Organist

Born November 11, 1944

Died March 25, 2020



Jennifer Bate has died at the age of 75. Her father was HA Bates, organist of St James Muswell Hill (1927-78). Though her musical sympathies were very

broad, she became known as a specialist of Messiaen whom she came to know late in his life. He entrusted to her the premiere of his *Livre du Saint-Sacrement* at Westminster Cathedral in 1986. She recorded the work as part of her series of Messiaen's complete organ works for Unicorn-Kanchana, recorded on the organs of L'Eglise de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris, and St Pierre de Beauvais Cathedral in the Hauts-de-France region (the recordings are now available from Regis).

'I always returned to Messiaen with a sense of the palate cleansed by a different sort of listening,' she told Francis Pott for *Gramophone's* May 1991 issue. 'In Messiaen it's his sheer space that daunts performers ... I'd discovered an instinct for working on his music, and without that experience maybe I wouldn't have had that crucial perception of time to embrace the precision of diapason voluntaries! In both, the tiniest detail must be right, or the whole isn't balanced.'

Another substantial recording project was the complete organ works of Mendelssohn which she recorded for Somm – Vol 3 was named a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice in April 2006. Reviewing it, Marc Rochester wrote: '[The] question – would Mendelssohn have approved of Jennifer Bate's performances? – is easily answered. If he wasn't impressed by the easy fluency of her technique or her highly articulate and intelligent interpretations ... then he was not the astute and sensitive musician history claims him to have been.'

She also recorded the complete organ works of César Franck (now on Regis) and the complete organ works by Peter

Dickinson (Naxos), as well as his Organ Concerto which she premiered and recorded for EMI (now on Heritage). She also recorded earlier organ music, focusing on English repertoire from John Stanley to Samuel Wesley (for Unicorn-Kanchana and later for Somm).

KERSTIN MEYER

Mezzo-soprano

Born April 3, 1928

Died April 14, 2020



The Swedish mezzo Kerstin Meyer has died at the age of 92. Born in Stockholm, she trained at the city's Royal College of Music and Opera School, as well as in Salzburg, Siena, Rome and Vienna. She made her debut with the Royal Swedish Opera in 1952 as Azucena in Verdi's *Il trovatore* and soon added Carmen to her repertoire (Carmen also gave her a major international break in a 1959 production in Hamburg by Wieland Wagner, with invitations from major international houses immediately forthcoming).

Her roles with the Swedish Royal Opera embraced both Verdi (Azucena, Eboli, Ulrica and Maddalena) and Wagner (Fricka, Erda, Waltraute and Brangäne) as well as Dido in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Countess Geschwitz in Berg's *Lulu* and Baba in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*.

As part of the Hamburg Opera company (1958-60 and '64-69) she was encouraged by the Intendant Rolf Liebermann to embrace contemporary roles, which gave her dramatic talents an opportunity for display and saw her creating a number of parts – Mrs Claibourne in Gunther Schuller's *Die Haimsuchung*, Alice Arden in Alexander Goehr's *Arden must die* and Gertraude in Humphrey Searle's *Hamlet*.

Meyer made her Royal Opera House debut in 1960 as Berlioz's Dido, and she appeared at La Scala and in Vienna at the invitation of Herbert von Karajan.

She was a regular performer at the Proms and, in addition, was a keen recitalist, often performing alongside her Swedish colleague, the soprano Elisabeth Söderström (together they recorded a programme for BIS)

On record she can be heard as Iocasta in Solti's Decca *Oedipus Rex*, as Countess Geschwitz (Ludwig/EMI), opposite Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in Schumann duets (DG), and as Annina on the classic 1956 Karajan *Der Rosenkavalier* (EMI).

DMITRI SMIRNOV

Composer

Born November 2, 1948

Died April 9, 2020



The Russian-British composer Dmitri Smirnov has died of the consequences of Covid-19. His style, displayed across operas, symphonies, and vocal and

chamber compositions, fused serialism, Franco-Russian sensuality and the symbolism of William Blake.

Born in Minsk, Smirnov grew up in Frunse. Between 1967 and 1972 he studied at the Moscow Conservatory with teachers including Edison Denisov and became acquainted with Philipp Herschkowitz, an influential student of Berg and Webern (a relationship that developed Smirnov's knowledge and incorporation, to a degree, of 12-tone technique into his own work).

In 1976, Smirnov won first prize for a work at the International Harp Week in Maastricht and subsequently rose to prominence as one of the leading young modernist Russian composers of his generation. Three years later, however, he was blacklisted – along with six other composers, including Denisov, his wife Elena Firsova, Sofia Gubaidulina and Vyacheslav Artyomov [see page 62] – by the Composers' Union under Khrennikov. As a result, Smirnov's music was no longer published nor performed.

Undeterred, Smirnov became a full-time composer in 1981 and was a founding member of the New Association for Contemporary Music in Moscow in 1990. Prior to that, in the late 1980s, the political thaw had allowed major performances of his music in the West, including the premieres of works inspired by his life-long muse Blake such as his first symphony *The Seasons* at the Tanglewood Festival and his opera *Tiriel* at the Freiburg Stadttheater. (In his *Gramophone* review of 'Russian Visions' on Somm in March this year, David Gutman wrote: 'The novelty [here] is Smirnov's *Tiriel*, a Blake-inspired composition by the pianist [Alissa Firsova]'s father. Doubling as the prologue to his similarly titled 1985 opera, it is an interrupted lullaby welcoming the release from grief afforded by sleep.'

In 1991, Smirnov and his family left Russia for the UK. Smirnov went on to hold teaching positions at various institutions including Dartington, Keele University, Goldsmiths and St John's College, Cambridge.

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














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John Neumeier

The choreographer and Director of Hamburg Ballet on putting Beethoven centre stage

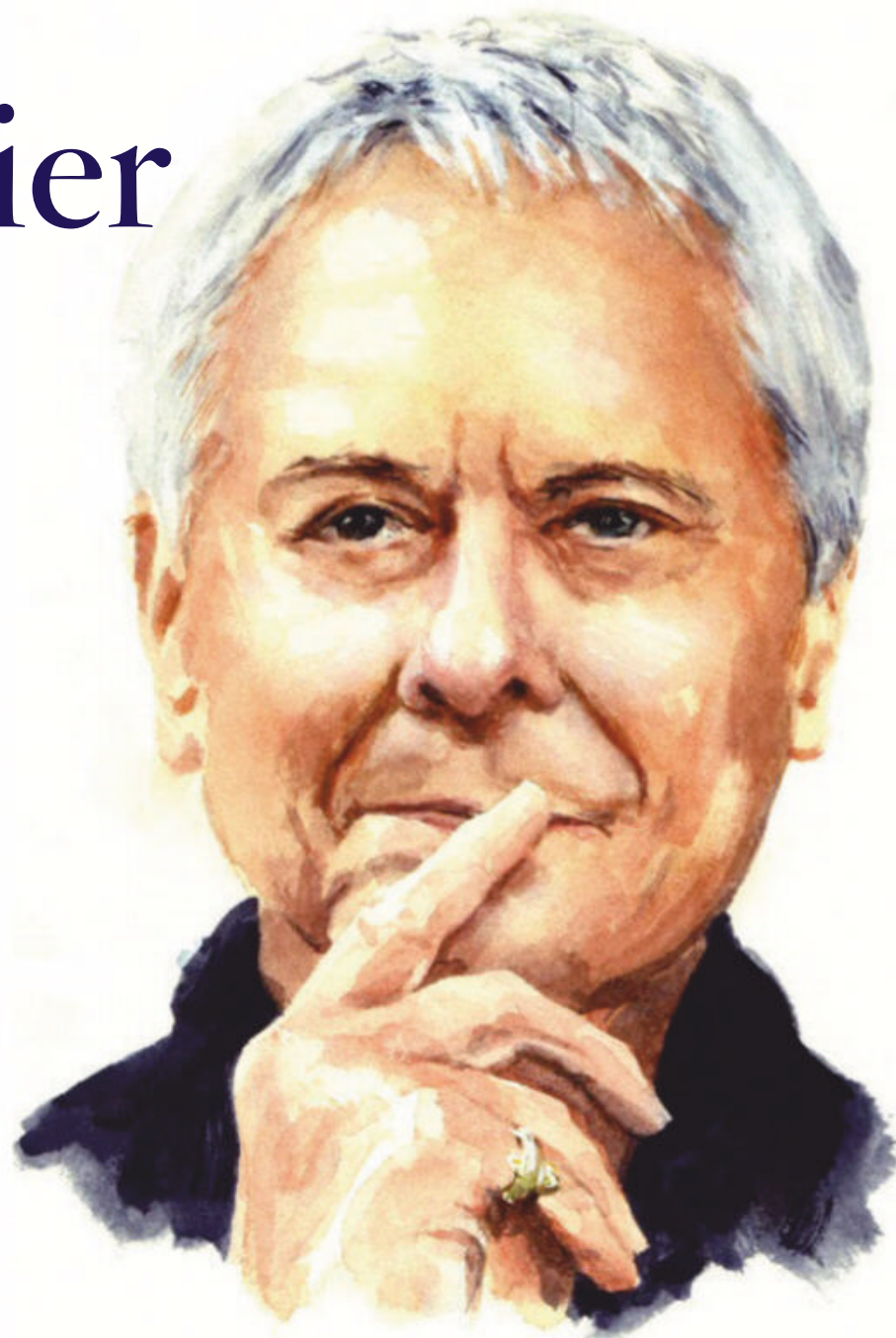
For me, there are two types of music. There's music that you can listen to and admire. I can go to a concert and listen to a Bruckner symphony – it's wonderful – but I couldn't stand up and move to that music. It doesn't touch something inside of me that gives a kind of physical or emotional shape to anything. And then there's music that takes me out of my seat and makes me move to it.

My love of classical music is led very much by instinct and emotional engagement. I loved to study and learn about music that moved me, and then later, as a choreographer, I was drawn to music that would then also move others.

Mahler's music – every work he wrote – has for me an inherent sense of movement which provides its emotional shape. As a result, I've made quite a few ballets using his music – all of the symphonies except the Second and the Eighth, as well as *Das Lied von der Erde* and many of the songs. When it comes to Beethoven, my experience with his music had always been one of admiration – listening to it, appreciating it and finding it beautiful – but I never entered into his emotional world. It happened in stages, I suppose. I was on holiday and I listened to all of his symphonies, and suddenly I felt that I'd been missing something all my life. Then, when I was listening to some of the piano music – I've always been very fond of Alfred Brendel's playing – I suddenly felt myself drawn in and became very interested. So, it seemed the right moment to start a project using the music of Beethoven.

I have a school connected to my ballet company here in Hamburg. A couple of years ago, the school turned 40 and I created *Beethoven Dances – 40 Dances for 40 Years*. It was a slightly different project because it had to be danced by everyone from the seven-year-old beginners to the final-year students, all 190 of them. I was doing my research and came across all those short dances, the contredanses and gavottes and so on, that Beethoven wrote in his early Vienna period. And in one of them [WoO14 No 7], I discovered the *Eroica* theme. It fascinated me because *The Creatures of Prometheus*, which also uses that same theme, was a project I'd considered doing years ago, but it didn't happen. And so, with the wonderful *Eroica* Variations for piano as my starting point, somehow the ballet began to take form for me, in two parts, the second culminating in the complete *Eroica* Symphony.

Making a ballet to a complete symphony is a huge challenge, and I would never underestimate it. I started the *Beethoven Project* very early and only with the *Eroica* Variations. I worked with the dancer Aleix Martínez alone for many weeks just because I didn't really know what I was going to do. And I never told him that he might 'be' Beethoven. We just improvised movements according to the emotional shape of the music. So, at that point I didn't know that I would use




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Beethoven Symphony No 9, 'Choral'
Soloists; Montreal SO & Chorus / Kent Nagano
Sony Classical

'Next year I'm doing a ballet based on Beethoven's Ninth with Kent Nagano; so this is often played!'

the *Geister* [Ghost] Trio movement, but suddenly from my reading about Beethoven's relationship with his mother it became clear to me that she was an important emotional element in the piece. And then a movement from the A minor String Quartet Op 132 became necessary as the idea of his not being able to hear his own music became more and more central, and with it the suffering that would impose. And that's how the first part of the *Beethoven Project* ended.

Every two years or so we guest-perform in Vienna at the Theater an der Wien, the place that witnessed the public premiere of the *Eroica* Symphony. Back in May 2018, we were performing my Chekhov ballet, *The Seagull*. In our spare time, we would work on the *Beethoven Project*, due to premiere the following month, in a studio high up in the theatre, and it dawned on me that this could have been where Beethoven had rooms, as he lived there for a while. And the strange thing was that I started to have a hearing problem: I couldn't hear in my right ear. Back in Hamburg, my doctor gave me medication – it was nothing serious – but it was a strange occurrence. Maybe it was psychological, who knows! 

'*Beethoven Project*' on C Major, a co-production with Hamburg Ballet John Neumeier, Unitel & SWR, is out on DVD & Blu-ray

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